

The Rediscovery of Wisdom

From Here to Antiquity in Quest of *Sophia*

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For my children, Julian and Charlotte

May the Lord bless you and keep you; may the Lord make
his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
May the Lord turn his face unto you, and give you peace.
(Numbers 6: 24–6)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1 Philosophy without Wisdom	6
1.1 The present-day philosophical landscape	6
1.2 The forgetting of wisdom	16
1.3 Three case-studies	19
1.4 The betrayal of <i>sophia</i>	28
2 The Classical Conception of Philosophy	31
2.1 Philosophy as quest for <i>sophia</i>	31
2.2 Plato on the form of the good	34
2.3 Aristotle's Unmoved Mover	53
2.4 The Unmoved Mover and the Judaeo-Christian God	72
2.5 Aristotle on the purpose of creation	74
3 The Decline and Fall of the Classical Conception	79
3.1 Philosophy in the age of wisdom	79
3.2 The Copernican Revolution	90
3.3 God's unwilling executioners	98
3.4 The assault on the Cosmological Argument	105
3.5 The assault on the Argument from Design	116
3.6 God's jubilant obituarist	126

4	The Wisdom of the Book Revisited	134
4.1	The hieroglyph of wisdom	134
4.2	Revelation in Christian orthodoxy	146
4.3	Revelation in Jewish orthodoxy	155
4.4	Revelation without grace or favour	160
5	Conclusion	171
	<i>Notes</i>	177
	<i>Bibliography</i>	188
	<i>Name Index</i>	193
	<i>Subject Index</i>	195

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Introduction

Why is there a world and why does it have the form it does? These questions seem perfectly legitimate, considering that the world need neither have existed, nor, given that it does, have assumed the broad form it has done. More than legitimate, these questions seem important. They seem to be questions for which anyone with any inkling of curiosity about the world would want answers, if answers were at all possible.

A disappointment and a surprise must surely await anyone today who hopes to find answers to these questions by turning to those who, on the surface at least, should be both best qualified and most professionally concerned to provide them. I speak, of course, of the class of contemporary professional academic philosophers. In their professional preoccupations, however, members of this group, for the most part, display towards our questions almost sublime indifference and have next to nothing to offer by way of answers.

It was not always so. For over 20 centuries before the present one, the ultimate ambition of practically all philosophers was to arrive at answers to these questions. Not only did philosophers consider this a perfectly legitimate ambition, it was one which the vast majority of philosophers were happy to agree had in broad outline been successfully accomplished quite early on in the history of their subject. In the eyes of the vast majority of philosophers before the present century, the various branches of the subject which today form its core, such as logic, epistemology and ethics, were but necessary preliminaries to or else corollaries of the successful ascent to the *pinnacle of philosophical understanding from which reasoned answers to our questions could be discerned*. Most philosophers were content to follow the path to this summit which had been marked out

early on in the history of the subject by those philosophical pioneers who had first made the ascent in classical antiquity. By contrast, most professional philosophers today seem content to spend all their time and energy in what were formerly regarded as only the foothills of the subject, its traditional peaks having seemingly receded entirely from view.

Those present-day philosophers who demur from considering, let alone preoccupying themselves with, our questions are not, of course, unaware of the far more ambitious objectives that their predecessors once harboured. If asked to explain their own willingness to settle for so much less, they are liable to respond, sometimes not altogether without a trace of condescension, by claiming that this past goal was a chimera which was never reached by those who set off in its direction, however deluded any might have been in thinking they had.

If asked how they can be so confident of the unattainability of the traditional goal of their subject, modern philosophers will as likely as not refer to certain key figures from its history who, it will be confidently announced, have convincingly and irrefutably established either that the human intellect is simply unequipped to provide satisfactory answers to these questions or else that the questions are somehow ill-formed and incapable of genuine answer. To further corroborate their unanswerableness, present-day philosophers will often appeal to the variety of past philosophical theories and systems which purport to provide answers. However fascinating these rival systems are and however valuable a form of training they provide students by their being required to consider and criticise them, none of these theories and systems, it will be said, is remotely capable of demonstration or even corroboration. Consequently, so it will be concluded, philosophers do best to content themselves with the more modest and manageable set of questions and issues that forms the scaled-down philosophy curriculum of today.

The aim of the present book is to argue on behalf of the reinstatement of a conception of philosophy which places the answering of these questions at the centre of the philosophical enterprise. I will do this by reconstructing and defending a certain set of answers to them on which, so I shall further attempt to show, practically all philosophers were broadly agreed until comparatively very recent times. These answers were by no means the exclusive preserve of philosophers. They were and continue to be promulgated by adherents of all the main monotheistic religions. My aim, in sum, is to defend the legitimacy of the view that the explanation of the world and its broad

form is that it is the creation of a supreme omnipotent and omniscient intelligence, more commonly referred to as God, who created it in order to bring into existence and sustain rational beings such as ourselves who, by exercising their intellects, can become aware of the existence of God and thereby join their Creator in the activity of contemplating God in which activity God is perpetually and blissfully engaged.

According to the conception of the subject to be defended here, the main ultimate division within philosophy is between the vast majority of contemporary professional ones, be they Anglo-American analytic philosophers or their more phenomenologically oriented 'continental' counterparts, and the vast majority of their predecessors since Plato and Aristotle. Members of the former group reject, whereas those within the latter group accept, the theistic explanation of the world adumbrated above. The aim of the present book is to restate and defend the philosophical case for theism by disposing of the main objections levelled against it by those philosophers who deny its cogency.

In what follows, I shall use the expression *the classical conception of philosophy* as a way of referring to that conception of the subject that construes its ultimate goal to be to arrive at reasoned answers to our questions, and which also accepts the theistic answers to them mentioned above. This conception may be summarised in the form of three theses which were assented to by all philosophers who espoused this conception of their subject. The first thesis is that *the goal of philosophy is the acquisition of sophia or theoretical wisdom*, where this is understood as consisting of a knowledge of why the world exists and has the broad form it does. The second thesis is that *the world is the handiwork of a supreme, omnipotent and omniscient intelligence, or God, who created it in order that its rational inhabitants be led by employing their rational intellects to a knowledge of their Creator, and thereby be able to join God in the activity of theoria, understood as the contemplation of God*. The third thesis is that *it is in the activity of theoria, so understood, that supreme human happiness consists*.

One major reason the classical conception of philosophy fell so much out of favour in the last century has undoubtedly been the close conceptual and historic associations it has acquired over the centuries with the several monotheistic religions, especially Christianity. Its partial congruence with these several mutually exclusive religions has undoubtedly done much to discredit it in the eyes of contemporary philosophers. This is because a substantial part of the teachings of

these religions is claimed by the respective adherents of each to have been disclosed to man through revelation not reason. It is extremely hard, if not impossible, to suppose that, were God to exist, He would have revealed *all* that is so considered by the different monotheistic religions. Since, except by a leap of faith, it seems impossible to privilege the view of any one monotheistic religion above the others, it seems difficult to give credence to the teachings of any. Although the theism which is common ground between these religions and the classical conception of philosophy is logically independent of the doctrines peculiar to each which are supposedly grounded upon revelation, nevertheless the apparent absence of rational grounds for preferring any one of the revealed religions above any other cannot but serve to raise an intellectual suspicion against them all – even, therefore, against that doctrine which they share in common with the classical conception of philosophy.

Even when entirely dissociated from every species of revealed religion and presented as pure natural theology, the theistic doctrine which lies at the core of the classical conception of philosophy is largely dismissed by philosophers today. Its claim to serious philosophical consideration, if not acceptance, is widely thought to have been exploded by the combined forces of a litany of modern and post-modern thinkers. Part of the aim of the present book is to rebut the arguments which have proved historically so influential in persuading present-day philosophers of the untenability of the case for theism.

The theistic doctrine at the core of the classical conception of philosophy once formed the lynchpin of western civilisation. It enjoyed this status from the fifth century CE onwards, when a heavily Neo-platonised form of Christianity became adopted as the official creed of the late Roman Empire. Theism was to become increasingly subject to challenge and was eventually altogether discarded by most philosophers in much the same way and for much the same sorts of reason as organised Christianity has been. Its abandonment was the outcome of that long historical process aptly termed by Max Weber the 'disenchantment of the world'. This process began with the Renaissance but found its supreme moment in the eighteenth century during that epoch of European thought known as the 'Enlightenment'. It was during this latter period that past superstitions and myths, of which organised Christianity was considered paramount, became subjected in Europe to the discerning gaze of a newly awakened and highly self-confident reason. The original self-confidence in the powers of rational discernment which was

characteristic of the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment has long since deserted their successors. However, Enlightenment scepticism towards organised Christianity has if anything intensified among philosophers. It has culminated in our day, not simply in a form of secularism or militant atheism that, for a long time, has been practically *de rigueur* among western intelligentsia, but in a novel and highly sophisticated form of relativistic nihilism known as *post-modernism*. According to those who share this fashionable intellectual posture, all belief systems are equally without rational basis and hence none is worthy of greater credence than any other. Posing as being motivated by a concern for all groups whose views have previously been marginalised and excluded, if not actively persecuted, during the long period in which Christianity enjoyed cultural hegemony, those of a post-modern outlook endeavour to undermine whatever residual intellectual and cultural privilege might still be enjoyed by any part of that which formerly constituted the high culture of western civilisation. Among those parts of the western cultural heritage which continue to be most under fire from post-modernism are those doctrines which Christianity shares with the classical conception of philosophy as well as those which are peculiar to it. The issue with which the present book is concerned, therefore, goes to the very core of our contemporary self-understanding and discursive practices, to use the jargon of those most remote from and hostile to the classical conception.

I shall be concerned here less with reversing currently jaundiced intellectual sensibilities towards any past or present form of organised religion than with rehabilitating those doctrines which the monotheistic religions share with the classical conception of philosophy. The most notable of these doctrines are, first, that human beings can come to know of the existence of God, and, second, that their supreme happiness consists in the activity of contemplating God. In the following chapter, I aim to show just how poorly understood the classical conception of philosophy has become.

1

Philosophy without Wisdom

1.1 The present-day philosophical landscape

The present-day philosophical landscape is dominated by two comparatively recent, still growing edifices of thought. Following precedent, I shall refer to them respectively as *positivistic naturalism*, or *naturalism* for short, and *anti-realism*.¹ The former viewpoint is more prevalent within the English-speaking world; the latter, in one of its many contemporary guises, is more prevalent in continental Europe and in other non-Anglophonic regions of the world. Together, these two viewpoints overshadow a third, much older viewpoint which once enjoyed philosophical pre-eminence. This third viewpoint was that which was erected to elaborate and to defend the Christian faith. It is from within one or other of these three mutually contending citadels of thought that practically all philosophical enquiry and debate is conducted today.

Between them, these three intellectual structures have come to obscure from view, and, as a result, have led to the diminished present-day understanding of, a fourth, still older philosophical paradigm. This viewpoint first emerged in classical antiquity from which time it enjoyed considerable popularity in philosophical circles until it became overshadowed by Christianity. Its eclipse, however, did not occur without many of its elements having become incorporated within Christian theology. It is this fourth and oldest of philosophical paradigms, which has become all but lost sight of today, to which I refer in what follows as the *classical conception of philosophy*.

After it became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Christianity enjoyed practically unrivalled hegemony within philosophical circles for well over a millennium. Not until that great

efflorescence of thought in the eighteenth century known as the Enlightenment was Christianity subjected to any significant form of philosophical challenge. Each of the two rival outlooks which jointly dominate the contemporary philosophical landscape and which at times threaten to eclipse the Christian one entirely was spawned by the Enlightenment.

The creed which the *Christian* philosophical paradigm was articulated to defend is so well known in broad outline as hardly to need adumbrating. In essence, Christianity conceives the world to be the creation of a God who, out of love for a morally errant humanity, underwent an incarnation in the form of the perfect human being, Jesus of Nazareth. He did so in order that his crucifixion might serve to atone for and thereby expiate the sins of whosoever should acknowledge Jesus to be their Saviour and endeavour to live as Jesus bid. Christianity supposes it had become necessary for God to undergo this incarnation to rescue his human creatures from the deleterious after-effects of an original act of wilful disobedience towards God committed by the first human beings. This had introduced into the world a form of moral disorder which had caused humanity to fall from an original state of grace in which they had enjoyed eternal life in communion with God. Those who recognise Jesus as their Saviour and who abide by his moral precepts are destined to enjoy such an eternal life upon his second coming. Then, so Christianity has it, the dead will be resurrected to receive final judgement. All and only those who possess the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity, by which last term Christianity means the love of God and one's neighbour as a fellow creature of God, will receive the ultimate benefit of an eternal life to be spent in loving communion with God and fellow Christians.

In sharpest contrast with Christianity stands each of the two great modern philosophical viewpoints which dominate the philosophical imagination today. According to *naturalism*, 'there is neither any basis nor any need to go beyond the world of experience and scientific explanation for an ultimate account of the meaning and value of reality in general and of human existence in particular'.² On this viewpoint, '[t]here is no God, nor anything else beyond nature; and we human beings are insignificant parts of a vast cosmic machine that proceeds in majestic indifference to us, our hopes and aspirations, our needs and desires, our sense of fairness and fittingness'.³ Anti-realism shares with naturalism a marked disdain for anything beyond the natural world, but it differs from naturalism in denying the natural

world to be ontologically independent of the human subjects who inhabit it. According to *anti-realism*,

it is we ourselves – we human beings – who are responsible for the basic structure of the world.⁴ ... [T]he whole phenomenal world ... receives its basic structures from the constituting activity of mind. Such fundamental structures of the world as those of space and time, object and property, ... truth and falsehood ... are not to be found in the world as such, but are somehow constituted by our own mental or conceptual activity ... We *impose* them on the world; we do not discover them there.⁵ ... It is characteristic of all [anti-realists] to hold that we human beings are somehow responsible for the way the world is – by way of our linguistic or more broadly symbolic activity, or by way of our decisions, or in some other way.⁶

Recent years have seen anti-realism spawn another outlook which has gained increasing ascendancy within Anglo-American and continental philosophical circles, known as *post-modernism*. This combines a general scepticism towards the idea that there is any significant general truth or body of truths which human beings are capable of coming to know with a relativistic nihilism according to which no point of view or outlook, besides the post-modern one itself, contains any more truth than any other. Among its adherents, post-modernism often fosters a deliberate and studied lack of commitment to any positive doctrine or doctrines beyond its denial that there are and can be any compelling reasons for giving assent to any. It is surely more than historical accident that post-modernism acquired the particular currency it does just at the moment that a previously popular secular alternative to naturalism and anti-realism lost favour. The discredited outlook which post-modernism has arguably replaced is, of course, *Marxism*, a viewpoint which combines a form of naturalism with an acute appreciation of the historicity of thought often bordering on anti-realism. As a result, Marxism can be conceived of as a sort of hybrid of the two.

In marked contrast with all the aforementioned viewpoints is that to which I am here referring as the *classical conception of philosophy*. As with Christianity and naturalism, the classical conception conceives the natural world as something which enjoys an existence apart from and quite independently of human beings and any and all of their linguistic structures and systems. The classical conception no more

conceives human beings to be the ultimate source and explanation of the world than it considers the world or the human beings in it to be the ultimate explanation of themselves. Rather, as in the case of Christianity, the classical conception of philosophy regards the natural world and the humans beings within it to be the creation of a supreme transcendent God. Again, like Christianity, the classical conception equates wisdom with a knowledge of God, construing such knowledge to be an indispensable condition of the supreme human good, which, again like Christianity, it equates with the loving contemplation of God.

Despite the classical conception having a close affinity with Christianity, there are several respects in which the classical conception stands closer to naturalism and anti-realism than it does to Christianity. First, in marked contrast with Christianity, but like naturalism and anti-realism, the classical conception of philosophy denies that any form of divine revelation has taken place in which God communicates to man certain important, but otherwise inaccessible, truths. Second, unlike Christianity, the classical conception dispenses entirely with both the efficacy of or need for any form of petitionary prayer or devotional worship.

The sources of each of the three main alternatives to the classical conception are complex and are different in each case. The doctrinal roots of Christianity clearly lie in the synoptic gospels and the scriptural teaching of Paul which, in turn, are rooted in the earlier scriptural sources of Judaism. Although, in developing and articulating their creed, Christian thinkers drew heavily upon the classical conception of philosophy, in so far as faith in the authenticity of the Christian revelation was deemed to be an absolutely necessary condition of eligibility for what Christianity identifies as the supreme human good, Christianity essentially repudiates the classical conception.

The roots of naturalism and anti-realism do not extend earlier than the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. This movement sought to complete the process of disencumbering humanity from all residual traces of long-standing error, which process had started with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. Among the principal errors from which Enlightenment thinkers hoped to emancipate humanity were those which they associated with all forms of organised religion, most notably of course, Christianity. For many, but not all, Enlightenment thinkers, among the 'errors' from which they hoped to free humanity were those which Christianity shared with

the classical conception as well as those peculiar to it. The secularisation of thought which began with the Enlightenment has continued unabated ever since. Increasingly inside and outside philosophy, it has become supposed that the credibility and fate of theism in any shape or form are inextricably interwoven with those of Christianity. This widespread supposition is one that the present book seeks to contest.

In the case of each of the main philosophical outlooks that has come to overshadow the Christian one, it is possible to identify certain key figures as being their principal architects or progenitors. In the case of naturalism, that figure is unquestionably David Hume. In the case of anti-realism, the honours must be divided between two principal thinkers, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche. Since their inception, each of these philosophical paradigms has undergone numerous vicissitudes. Even in the case of anti-realism, which is the more recent of the two currently dominant philosophical paradigms, a comparatively long period of time has lapsed since the publication of those texts in which it received its original and arguably still canonical formulation. Since their respective inceptions, all these outlooks have been subject to several different waves of estimation as well as numerous other vicissitudes. Nonetheless, in so far as contemporary philosophy tends to be either naturalistic or anti-realist, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche may justly be regarded as the principal architects of the contemporary philosophical landscape. Behind and alongside these three figures, however, stand many other important, if ultimately less seminal, thinkers who have each helped to shape each of these two traditions. Included here, for example, are Hegel and Kierkegaard in the case of anti-realism, and Darwin in the case of naturalism.

However much their own views and ideas might have differed from one another, the three philosophers whom I have identified as being the principal architects of modernity and post-modernity share towards all forms of organised Christianity and other forms of ecclesiasticism a common antipathy. Beyond that, all three thinkers shared a common hostility towards all outlooks in which it is God rather than man who is the central preoccupation and concern. Latter-day atheism and secularism are a common legacy of all three philosophers. If, for the moment, we set post-modernism aside, which, as has been pointed out,⁷ is, in any case, but an offshoot and special form of anti-realism, then the only currently conspicuous philosophical rival to naturalism and anti-realism is that designed to articulate and defend Christianity. This remains especially so, since the collapse of

communism led to the demise of Marxism as an intellectual force.

Although naturalism and anti-realism are both wholly secular and this-worldly in outlook, from the perspective of each the other can appear much closer to Christianity than it appears to itself. Contemporary naturalists are prone to look upon anti-realism as being no less obfuscatory, unrigorous and unscientific as they consider Christianity to be. For their part, anti-realists consider the realism common to both naturalism and Christianity as philosophically naive and uncritical. Anti-realists consider realism in all its forms to incorporate a profound misconception about human subjectivity to which anti-realists refer as comprising its *objectification*.⁸ By this expression, anti-realists denote what they consider to be the mistaken supposition that human beings are in possession of a fixed nature or essence beyond their collective or individual capacity to (re)construct or alter. Anti-realists believe that this mistaken supposition imposes severe artificial limits upon what humans are collectively, if not individually, capable of making of themselves.

In the case of Christianity, objectification is said to consist, not just in the postulation of an immaterial and immortal human soul, but in the postulation of God as well. According to at least some anti-realists, this notion evacuates from human beings all the worth and perfection of which they are collectively capable by projecting these qualities onto an imaginary being.

In the case of naturalism, objectification is said to take the form of treating human beings as merely another set of items in nature whose thought, behaviour and culture are mistakenly supposed capable of being understood by employing the same categories and investigative strategies as have been successfully used in the study of nature. Anti-realists deny such modes of enquiry and investigation can attain any adequate grasp of what is distinctive of and most important about human beings, all of which stems from their capacity to engage in symbolic meaning and understanding. Whatever possesses symbolic meaning – and all thought, action and culture do – is said to require for its adequate comprehension different more interpretive modes of understanding than those which naturalists are wont to employ. Anti-realists regard the naturalistic attempt to understand humanity by employing techniques and categories drafted in from the natural sciences as being no less a baneful and alienating form of objectification than the corresponding form of objectification of which they consider Christianity to be guilty. In the opinion of anti-realists, Christianity leads to the undervaluation of man and to an attitude of

impotent resignation in the face of whatever is unsatisfactory in his condition at any time. Anti-realists deem naturalism guilty of an opposite, but no less deleterious, practical attitude. This is said to be the hubristic aspiration for unlimited technological human control and mastery over nature, combined with the misguided refusal to acknowledge man's ultimate freedom and responsibility.

Anti-realists are wont to consider the naturalistic understanding of human subjectivity to be symptomatic of a more pervasive intellectual syndrome which they claim has afflicted western society since the Enlightenment to which they give the name *scientism*. Scientism is an ethico-intellectual malady which involves the overvaluation of science and supposedly combines two harmful errors. The first is a toleration of, or, worse still, blindness to, the brutalising effects of advanced technology and the mass culture which this technology makes possible. The second is the misguided attempt to understand human beings by employing investigative methods and techniques imported from the natural sciences. In the opinion of some anti-realists, this error extends to a misplaced faith in human subjectivity itself, such anti-realists rejecting the idea that human beings are rational subjects or selves in terms of whose individual or collective psychologies it is possible to gain an understanding of human social and cultural products.

It is one thing, and it is doubtless entirely correct, for contemporary anti-realists to eschew scientism as defined above. It is an altogether different thing, and is far more questionable, for them to exhibit, as many anti-realists do, hostility towards modern science and technology *per se*. Again, it is one thing, and is arguably quite correct, for contemporary naturalists to favour natural science, even the realism that unthinkingly lies behind science. It is quite another, and it is arguably as misguided, for naturalists to equate a favourable attitude towards science, technology and realism with naturalism, something that happens all too often in Anglo-American philosophy. The classical conception of philosophy constitutes an alternative to both naturalism and anti-realism that is neither scientistic nor anti-scientific. For a long time, proper appreciation of it has been obstructed by the two philosophical paradigms that currently dominate the philosophical landscape. Many contemporary philosophers mistakenly suppose there to be no other alternative to one or other of these two approaches, apart from what they consider to be the equally untenable alternatives of Christianity and Marxism. Although widespread, this supposition is mistaken. The classical conception of philosophy is such a genuine alternative.

Because this conception of philosophy has fallen so far into desuetude these days, it is often supposed that the theistic doctrine at its core must be either dogmatically grounded or else otherwise endemically opposed to and incompatible with the deliverances of natural science. This is not so. Moreover, in contrast with Christianity, the classical conception neither requires nor involves having to accept on faith or to give credence to the occurrence of any supposed miraculous breaches of scientific law which supposedly served to validate the revelation of doctrines otherwise inaccessible to human reason. In its original pre-Christian pagan form, the classical conception of philosophy was void of all such tenets which are an indispensable part of all forms of organised religion such as Christianity. The central theistic doctrines at the core of the classical conception were initially arrived at by means of pure ratiocination and without recourse to or supplementation by any supposed deliverance of revelation confirmed by means of miracles.

That a wholly rationalistically based theism lies at the core of pagan philosophy started to become obscured as early as the fourth century CE, when philosophical apologists for theism increasingly became Christian. Pagan philosophical theism has become especially obscure since the Enlightenment. From this time onwards, philosophical attempts to demonstrate or to defend theism have almost invariably been mounted from a Christian perspective according to which ancient pagan theism is ultimately no less misguided than naturalism and anti-realism. It is in this way that the true contours of the classical conception of philosophy have become all but wholly obscured. The aim of the present book is to restore to view and to defend this ancient conception of philosophy.

The classical conception differs from naturalism by not supposing nature to be self-explanatory or the terminus of all explanation. Rather, as with some versions of anti-realism, the classical conception goes beyond or outside the natural world to explain it as the creation of a mind. Unlike most contemporary forms of anti-realism, however, and in a manner akin to Christianity, the mind in terms of which the classical conception explains the natural world is not a human one but is divine. Unlike Christianity and all other forms of organised religion, however, the classical conception of philosophy affirms theism exclusively on the basis of reason. It gives no credence to any doctrines save those which are accessible to man through reason and independently of their disclosure through special acts of divine revelation. Since it considers its constitutive doctrines to be no less well

grounded than those of the natural sciences, the classical conception has no more truck with faith as the basis for its outlook than do either naturalism or anti-realism.

The early Church fathers who helped to form the great corpus of Christian thought that has grown up since the second century were fully aware of the classical conception. For a long time at the dawn of the Christian era, Christian apologists contended against it, rightly regarding the classical conception as a rival. So threatened were early Christians by the classical conception in its pagan form that they successfully sought its suppression. As a result, the texts of Aristotle in which the conception had received its fullest but still never complete articulation fell into oblivion in Europe for well over a thousand years. There these works remained until rescued by Muslim translators in the eleventh century. By the circuitous route of first being translated from their original Greek into Arabic and then into Latin, Aristotle's works gradually found their way back into mainstream European philosophy in the twelfth century. Only then was their true potential for the Christian faith fully recognised. Among the first to recognise their potential was Thomas Aquinas. He drew up an elaborate philosophical defence of Christian orthodoxy based upon Aristotelian principles on which Christian orthodoxy became thereafter and for a long time increasingly reliant. Christian reliance on Aristotelian natural theology diminished after Aristotelian cosmology fell victim to the new philosophy of nature which developed from the Renaissance onwards. From that time onwards, the classical conception has become ever less well understood, both by Christian theologians as well as by non-Christian philosophers purporting sympathy with it.

Undoubtedly, one of the major reasons why the classical conception of philosophy has become so poorly understood today has been the keenness of Christian theologians to deny that Plato and Aristotle were genuinely theistic in outlook. To illustrate their reluctance, consider the gloss placed upon the attitude of early Christians towards Aristotle by the author of a recent and otherwise highly illuminating survey of philosophy during the early Christian period. The reader is informed concerning Aristotle that

He was criticised [by early Christians]. . . , *perhaps, with . . . justice*, for remaining rather cool and formal in his attachment to a theistic world view. The last book of the *Ethics*, however, commended itself by exalting the value of 'contemplation' (*theoria*) as opposed to the pursuit of physical pleasure or fame. Contemplation is good

because of the goodness of what is contemplated; but *it is not at once clear why this should be* in a system which rejects the ideal Forms upheld by Plato.⁹ (my emphasis)

The quoted passage itself leaves it unclear whether what the reader is supposed to find unclear in Aristotle is why he considered the object of contemplation to be good, or whether what is unclear is why, given the supposed goodness of the object of contemplation, Aristotle should have considered its goodness capable of communicating itself to the activity of contemplating it. So far as concerns the first of these two possible alternatives, *pace* the author of the passage, it is as clear as perhaps anything can be *why* Aristotle considered the object of *theoria* to be good. As the author of the passage in question himself recognises, Aristotle considered the object of this activity to be none other than that which Aristotle supposed to be the object of God's own act of contemplation, namely, God Himself. Given the various qualities which Aristotle supposed God possessed, it can hardly be mysterious why Aristotle should have considered this Being to be good. Moreover, given that he did, it can hardly be any less clear why Aristotle should have considered the human activity of contemplating this Being to be good. He considered it so for much the same general kind of reason as we may so consider all human acts of beholding supremely good or beautiful objects. What remains unclear from the passage under discussion is not why Aristotle should have considered the object and activity of *theoria* to be good. It is rather why the author of this passage should have wanted his readers to suppose it to have been just of early Christians to call into question the degree of Aristotle's attachment to a theistic world-view. Certainly, Aristotle did not advocate churchgoing, the mass or petitionary prayer. But it hardly seems possible to question the degree of commitment to theism of a philosopher who makes contemplation of God the highest human activity and that in which supreme human happiness consists!

As we shall see, there are many other instances where Aristotle's philosophy has become subject to misrepresentation by expositors of his anxious to deny it to have been theistic in any full-blooded sense. One can understand such misrepresentation in the case of a Christian theologian. It is less readily understandable why Aristotle's philosophy should have become so badly misrepresented by philosophical expositors of his who profess sympathy for and interest in it. This is especially so in the case of those without benefit of the excuse of having a Christian creed to defend. Nonetheless, as we shall see

shortly, similar forms of incomprehension and misrepresentation of Aristotle's views are not uncommon today.

1.2 The forgetting of wisdom

As well as being predominantly atheistic or at least agnostic in character, the most prevalent forms of philosophy today differ from the classical conception of the subject in eschewing any concern with, or, indeed, much appreciation of, what was originally conceived to be the purpose and aim of the subject. This was the acquisition of theoretical wisdom or *sophia*. No matter what their philosophical orientation is, few present-day philosophers appear to have an accurate notion of, let alone much concern with, that for the sake of which philosophers originally engaged in the subject. Few, of course, are unaware of the etymology of the word 'philosophy', deriving as it does from the Greek words *phile*, meaning 'love', and *sophia*, meaning 'wisdom'. Few present-day philosophers, however, seem to have much idea of, or to be concerned with, that which philosophers supposedly loved and were seeking to acquire by engaging in the subject. In sum, philosophers today would, for the most part, appear to have forgotten what wisdom is and what its supposed attractions were in the eyes of its original lovers.

The practical disappearance from present-day philosophy of any proper understanding of *sophia* and the attractions it was formerly supposed to have is revealed by the virtual omission of discussions of the topic from practically all recent companions to and encyclopaedias and dictionaries of philosophy. Until 1998, the most comprehensive guide to philosophy in English for almost half a century had been the eight-volume *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* edited by Paul Edwards. This work does contain an entry on 'wisdom', but this entry concentrates entirely on practical as against theoretical wisdom. All it says about theoretical wisdom is the following. 'In addition ... to practical wisdom, he [Aristotle] recognised another and purely intellectual virtue, the wisdom that pursues truth for its own sake and without reference to practice. In this pursuit, which can be followed effectively only by the philosopher, lay the highest and happiest life.'⁹ This statement hardly provides much information about theoretical wisdom. Even that little manages to misrepresent Aristotle's views. *Pace* the author of the entry, Aristotle did not believe theoretical wisdom to be exhibited in the *pursuit* of truth for its own sake. On the contrary, in so far as the *pursuit* of something implies that

the object being pursued has not yet been grasped by its pursuer, anyone engaged in pursuing wisdom must be presumed to lack it. Hence, the pursuit of truth, even that pursued for its own sake, cannot be what wisdom consists in. In fact, Aristotle equates the intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom with the *possession* of knowledge of certain truths that had been pursued for its own sake. Furthermore, the activity in which, according to Aristotle, the highest and happiest life consists is not the *pursuit* of such wisdom. It consists rather in some other activity in which wisdom is *exercised* and which is not possible until after wisdom has been acquired. What this other activity is we shall consider presently.

The Edwards encyclopaedia does contain a brief discussion of *sophia* in the entry on philosophy. The discussion here manages to be no less misleading than is the entry on wisdom. It is stated here that "*philosophia*" etymologically connotes the love of exercising one's curiosity and intelligence rather than love of wisdom'.¹¹ This is manifestly untrue. Aristotle distinguished between curiosity, a trait which he says is common to all men, and the love of wisdom, a trait peculiar only to some. For Aristotle, theoretical wisdom consists in knowing the *causes* of things in general and the most general and highest causes at that. An interest in such knowledge goes well beyond curiosity. Moreover, while it might well be curiosity that initiates the pursuit of such knowledge, it by no means follows that wisdom is loved and sought after by those who engage in philosophy solely for the sake of their being able thereby to satisfy their curiosity. On the contrary, Aristotle commends wisdom and its pursuit because of the inestimably supreme value which he attaches to that activity in which he claims the possession of wisdom is exercised. Were wisdom to be loved and sought after only for the sake of satisfying curiosity and intelligence, there *would* be no further activity in which to engage after curiosity had been satisfied through acquiring wisdom.

No separate entries for 'wisdom' or '*sophia*' appear in the *Dictionary of Philosophy*,¹² edited by Antony Flew, or in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*,¹³ edited by Simon Blackburn. The *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*¹⁴ does contain an entry on wisdom but this merely refers the reader to the entry on 'cardinal virtues' where discussion focuses exclusively on the practical virtues without mention being made of *sophia*. The terms 'wisdom' and *sophia* do not occur in the index of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*¹⁵ edited by G. H. R. Parkinson, or in that of *Philosophy: A Guide through the Subject*¹⁶ edited by A. C. Grayling, or in that of the *Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*,¹⁷ edited by Nicholas

Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James. Likewise, there is no entry for either term in the *Concise Encyclopaedia of Western Philosophy and Philosophers*¹⁸ edited by J. O. Urmson and Jonathan Ree.

Since the publication of the Edwards encyclopaedia, there have been only two further discussions of 'wisdom' in encyclopaedias and companions of philosophy. The first occurs in the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*¹⁹, edited by Ted Honderich. The second occurs in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* edited by Edward Craig.²⁰ In the *Oxford Companion*, 'wisdom' is described as

a form of understanding that unites a reflective attitude and a practical concern. The aim of the attitude is to understand the fundamental nature of reality and its significance for living a good life. The object of the practical concern is to form a reasonable conception of a good life ... and to evaluate the situations in which [agents] have to make decisions and act from a point of view.... Wisdom may be identified then with good judgment about the evaluation of complex situations and conceptions of a good life in the light of a reflective understanding of the human condition.²¹

Fine as this account of wisdom is so far it goes, it hardly offers much by way of information as to the form or forms of understanding of the fundamental nature of reality in which wisdom is claimed to have been traditionally thought to consist. The reason for the author's reticence becomes clear in the brief highly revealing paragraph with which the entry closes. Here, it is stated that '[a]lthough wisdom is what philosophy is meant to be a love of, little attention has been paid to this essential component of good lives in post-classical Western philosophy. It is perhaps for this reason that those in search of it often turn to the obscurities of oriental religions for enlightenment'.²²

In the *Routledge Encyclopaedia*, wisdom is said to be 'the type of knowledge needed to discern the good and live the good life'. This description of wisdom hardly suffices to distinguish theoretical wisdom from practical wisdom. The entry takes note of the passing from philosophy of its traditional concern with wisdom, it being duly noted that 'wisdom is little evident as a subject of contemporary philosophical discussion'.²³ However, little light is shed on why this has come about. The entry concludes, however, by suggesting that philosophy might be about to return to this subject. 'Wisdom [had] an early association with infallibility, which was guaranteed to make

wisdom seem an impossible achievement for human beings.... Perhaps as the criteria for human knowledge relax and conceptions of the good life ... become clearer, philosophy will find that it can return to the study of wisdom.'

The failure on the part of contemporary philosophers to appreciate in what theoretical wisdom was originally thought to consist is quite ubiquitous. Equally so is the failure to appreciate why wisdom was considered to be so worth striving for. Even the few recent extended philosophical discussions of wisdom reveal their authors to be unaware of how wisdom was originally conceived and what its relation to the highest form of human happiness was supposed to be. To illustrate the extent and depth of present-day ignorance within philosophy as to the original goal of the subject, I shall in the next section briefly consider three comparatively recent fairly extended discussions of the topic.

1.3 Three case-studies

Our first specimen discussion comes from a collection of essays by the formidable political philosopher, Robert Nozick.²⁴ Among the essays in this book is one which bears the promising title, 'What is Wisdom and Why do Philosophers Love It so?' Here we are informed that '[w]isdom is an understanding of what is important, where this understanding informs a (wise) person's thought and action'.²⁵ This characterisation of wisdom contains an ambiguity that Nozick's subsequent discussion fails to dispel, or even suggests its author was fully aware of. Nozick's assertion that wisdom is an understanding of what is important admits of two different interpretations. It can be interpreted to mean, first, that wisdom consists in an understanding of what things in life are important and what things are not important, in the sense of being worthy and unworthy of importance being attached to them. In this sense, to be wise is to know, among many other things, whether or not it is worth getting worked up about which football team wins the championship. Nozick's assertion can also be interpreted to mean that wisdom consists in having an understanding of whichever topic(s) it is important to have an understanding of. To be wise in this sense is to know whatever it is important to know. Clearly, these two different ways of interpreting the expression 'an understanding of what is important' are by no means identical. It may be that what is and what is not important is a topic of which it is important to have an understanding. Equally,

however, it is clearly at least possible that, in order to be wise, what someone needs to understand is something else besides, or in addition to, an understanding of what things are and what things are not important. Nowhere does Nozick makes it clear whether the kind of understanding in which he considers wisdom to consist is an understanding of what things are and what things are not important, or whether wisdom involves an understanding of some other important topic besides this one, and, if so, what this other topic is. Nor does Nozick at all explain what contribution wisdom makes to living well, should the important topic of which he thinks it necessary to have an understanding to be wise turn out to be something else besides the topic of what is important and what unimportant.

The most charitable construction that it is possible to place upon Nozick's discussion suggests that he wants to equate wisdom with an understanding of what things are important and what not important, *plus* an understanding of some other important topic or topics besides this which is closely related to having an explanation of the world. That Nozick wishes to make an understanding of the former topic part of wisdom is suggested by the following remark he makes:

Wisdom is not just one type of knowledge, but diverse. What a wise person needs to know and understand constitutes a varied list: the most important goals and values of life – the ultimate goal, if there is one; what means will reach these goals without too great a cost; ... knowing what the true and unapparent value of various things is; ... understanding ... how to cope and deal with the major tragedies and dilemmas of life.²⁶

All the items which are mentioned in this list pertain to the topic of what things in life are important and what things are not important. Besides an understanding of this topic, Nozick would seem also to have wished to include within wisdom the understanding of some additional topic that pertains to why the world exists. He writes, '[w]isdom is not just knowing how to steer one's way through life, cope with difficulties etc. It is also knowing the *deepest* story, being able to see and appreciate the deepest significance of whatever occurs.'²⁷ The locution, 'knowing the *deepest* story', suggests that, as well as understanding what things are important in life and what things are not so, wisdom involves understanding something else besides. A natural interpretation of this locution suggests that part of what wisdom involves is understanding *why* the world exists and has

the form it does, for there can hardly be a deeper story than that. Nozick's discussion leaves it entirely unclear, however, what the connection is supposed to be between the possession of such a form of knowledge and living well. Nozick acknowledges himself to be fully aware that the wisdom which philosophers loved and after which they aspired was supposed by them to make a contribution to their well-being. However, on Nozick's account of it, the practical value of wisdom seems to be entirely exhausted by that part of it which consists in understanding what is and what is not important. On Nozick's account of wisdom, the part of it which consists in understanding the deepest story seems not to make any contribution itself to the happiness of its possessor.

Everything that Nozick writes about wisdom suggests that the only possible contribution that knowing the deepest story can make to the personal happiness of one who has this knowledge is to lead its possessor to an understanding of that other topic of which, on Nozick's account, it is necessary to have an understanding in order to be wise. This is the topic of what is and what is not important. However, Nozick nowhere reveals in what way the two forms of understanding are supposed to be connected. Nor does he anywhere in the essay give any hint as to what he thinks the deepest story might be. Indeed, he seems to confess himself to be devoid of any clue as to what this story might be. At one point, he remarks,

Perhaps the diversity of wisdom is only apparent and it all can flow from some one central understanding.... [S]omeone who understood the one truth from which all of wisdom flowed [would] see far more deeply ... than someone who lived similarly yet grasped only the diversity, but, if the theoretical unification could make no practical difference, it is not clear he would be wiser.²⁸

In a footnote appended to this paragraph, Nozick adds with disarming candour that '[w]hether or not the different components of wisdom are derivable from one single truth, one might try to see them as aspects of one coherent intellectual structure.... However, I do not know of any one integrated structure that illuminatingly includes all the pieces of wisdom.'²⁹ Being himself only a lover of and seeker after wisdom, Nozick can arguably be excused for clearly not being acquainted with any such structure and hence unable to give any account of it. However, the account of the deepest story which was given by those philosophers who considered themselves in possession

of one reveals that they conceived its contribution to their happiness in wholly different terms from those in which Nozick characterises its contribution. Moreover, given that he professes not to know such a story, it is puzzling why Nozick should have wished to write with such seeming authority on the subject of wisdom and why philosophers valued it so.

There is a sense in which Nozick is correct that anyone in possession of an understanding of the deepest story picture will *ipso facto* thereby possess an understanding of what things are and what are not important. This, however, is not so much because, from such an understanding, it is possible to read off or infer what things in life are important and what things are not important. To see what the proper relation is, assume that knowing the deepest picture consists in knowing why the world exists and has the form it does, and assume, further, that the explanation why the world exists and has the form it does is that God so created it. In such circumstances, knowing the deepest story would involve knowing of the existence and nature of God and hence would involve being able to engage in the contemplation of God. Because God is a supremely perfect being, the activity of contemplating God will be an unsurpassably blissful one. Indeed, those who have experienced the bliss of contemplating God will know this activity to be more pleasurable and desirable than any other. It is because a knowledge of the deepest story directly acquaints those who possess such knowledge with the supreme human good that those who acquire an understanding of the deepest story will inexorably be led thereby to acquire an understanding of what is and is not important. They will acquire such an understanding, however, not by deducing it from their knowledge of the deepest story. Rather, their understanding of the deepest story will provide them with a knowledge of God in the contemplation of whom they will come to enjoy the greatest possible human bliss. Their understanding of the deepest story will lead them to understand what is important in life by making it possible for them to enjoy the highest form of human happiness through engaging in the activity of contemplating God. Wisdom as an understanding of the deepest story leads to the highest form of human happiness. It is because it does and only because it does that wisdom can contribute to the formation of a correct understanding of what in life is important. Such knowledge leads whoever has it to correctly order their priorities in life and hence to understand what is and is not important.

Philosophers loved and aspired after wisdom, in the sense of an

understanding of the deepest story, therefore, not solely or even primarily for the sake thereby of acquiring an understanding of what is and is not important in life by reference to which they would then be able to live as well as they could. Rather, they loved and sought after an understanding of the deepest story to be able to engage in the activity which such an understanding made possible. This was the contemplation of that Being whose existence and nature *are* the deepest story.

As does Nozick, philosophers who subscribed to the classical conception of their subject were wont to distinguish between two different kinds of wisdom, practical and theoretical. The former sort of wisdom corresponds with what Nozick calls an understanding of what is and is not important, the latter with that which Nozick calls an understanding of the deepest story. Aristotle, for example, distinguished between *theoretical wisdom* or *sophia* and *practical wisdom* or *phronesis*. He equated the former with an understanding of the ultimate explanation of things; the latter with knowing what things are worth striving for both as an individual and on behalf of the communities which one might be involved in helping to regulate and govern. It is vitally important to emphasise that, as the name of the discipline implies, it is *sophia* and not *phronesis* which philosophy was conceived of as being a search after and love of. The reason that *sophia* was so highly esteemed was not because, once obtained, it was supposed to lead to the other, practical form of wisdom. It was valued for an entirely different reason, namely, that it made possible a particular mental activity that was claimed to be more desirable than any other and hence was one with which the highest human happiness was equated. To this supremely desirable mental activity, philosophers like Aristotle gave the name *theoria*. It consisted in the contemplation of those entities which had come to be known to be the explanation of things. Unlike those who espoused the classical conception of philosophy, Nozick leaves it entirely unclear why philosophers loved wisdom so.

Many contemporary philosophers are aware that, in classical times, the object of philosophical love was theoretical wisdom rather than practical wisdom, as they are that this form of wisdom was sought after and valued above all for the sake of enabling its possessors to engage in the activity of *theoria* or contemplation, an activity which was deemed to possess supreme intrinsic value. Nonetheless, even when they are, few seem fully to appreciate that the reason why *theoria* was so highly valued in classical times was because its object

was supposed to be God. Unless it is clearly understood that what the search for *sophia* was supposed to issue in was knowledge of God as the explanation of the world, it is impossible fully to grasp what *theoria* was supposed to consist in and why it was valued as highly as it was.

A failure to appreciate how integral God was supposed to be to *theoria* vitiates the second of the three contemporary treatments of wisdom we are currently considering to illustrate just how poorly understood the notion has become. Our second illustrative case-study is the treatment which Aristotle's conception of wisdom receives from Antony Kenny in a book devoted to Aristotle's conception of the best possible form of human life.³⁰ Much of what Kenny writes about Aristotle's account of the perfect life is perfectly accurate and informative. For example, Kenny is perfectly correct to observe that 'according to *NE* [Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*], understanding (*sophia*) is the most perfect virtue, and the activity which is the exercise of understanding, that is to say contemplation (*theoria*), is what perfect happiness consists in'.³¹ Kenny is also correct when he claims that, for Aristotle, 'God is related to the intellectual virtue of *sophia* as being the principal object of its activity of contemplation'.³² However, Kenny starts to go badly wrong in his concluding chapter, entitled 'Theology, Science, and Contemplation'. Here, Kenny seeks to show that, even without supposing God to be the ultimate explanation of the world, it is still possible to regard *sophia*, as well as the activity of *theoria* which *sophia* makes possible, to be as valuable and as worth pursuing as Aristotle claimed them to be. Kenny argues that natural scientific enquiry can be regarded as being a perfectly adequate latter-day secular equivalent to *theoria* as conceived of by Aristotle. He writes:

When we look at Aristotle's account of contemplation from a modern secular viewpoint, ... [m]odern commentators ... have in mind not a meditating monk but a philosophical, or more generally, a scientific researcher. It is for this reason that so much recent attention has been focused on the relationship, especially in *NE*, between contemplative and political happiness. For it is related to the decision, to be made in the actual lives of Aristotle's twentieth-century readers, how much energy and effort to devote to philosophical and scientific research and how much to social and political activity.

The modern equivalent of the question to which Aristotle

addressed himself is the problem of the role of science in society. Whatever 'contemplation' exactly means, one contemporary equivalent of it is the pursuit of basic science. . . . [T]he pursuit of scientific truth is an activity which needs no further external good to make it worthwhile, so that science has an independent value in its own right. . . . The discovery of scientific truth is not just a permissible goal to pursue: it is an admirable goal; in Aristotle's terms it is something noble. It is a pursuit which it is allowable, and indeed laudable, to devote one's life to. . . . Why is this? The answer is that the goal which the scientist seeks is a goal which is good not just for himself, not just for his customers or shareholders, but for the human race as a whole.

The goal of science is not just truth, but scientific truth . . . [which] is a value of a higher order than truth *simpliciter*. . . . [S]cientific truth . . . is connected intimately with the notions of necessity and universality. . . . It is this which makes scientific truth a value which transcends the contingencies of particular historical sciences.³³

Kenny here argues on behalf of there being a sufficiently close analogy between modern scientific enquiry, on the one hand, and *theoria*, as conceived of by Aristotle, on the other, as to warrant supposing the former activity to be every bit as intrinsically valuable as Aristotle considered *theoria* to be. The analogy seems hopelessly strained and unconvincing, as does the argument which Kenny offers for the intrinsic value of scientific enquiry. To start with the latter point first, it is doubtful whether scientific enquiry pursues a truth that is any more universal and necessary than that which with equal justice may be claimed to be pursued within artistic and literary endeavour. This being so, scientific enquiry cannot be claimed to be any more valuable an activity than these. Yet, Aristotle certainly did suppose *theoria* to be more valuable than any of these other forms of activity. This is so, even when some of these are recognised as being concerned, as, arguably, Aristotle recognised tragedy to be, with the depiction of a truth-content.

More importantly, Kenny's analogy between *theoria* and scientific enquiry seems altogether misplaced. As several of his commentators have noticed,³⁴ Aristotle conceives of the activity of *theoria* to be less a process of seeking to discover the truth, than a mental operation performed on certain items of knowledge which are supposed to be the product of the successful completion of the process of enquiry.

This point is clearly made by Richard Kraut in his masterly treatment of the subject. He observes that,

To contemplate [for Aristotle] is to bring to mind the truths of some theoretical discipline. It is not the activity of searching for the truth within some field, but rather a process of reflection on a system of truths already discovered.... Although anyone who is actively reflecting on any proposition, whatever its content, may be loosely said to be engaged in *theoria* with respect to that proposition, Aristotle clearly has something more exalted in mind.... I take him to be singling out a state of mind that is the highest a human being can strive for: it is the activation of the understanding one has achieved when one has acquired *sophia*, theoretical wisdom.... [T]o have this virtue is to have understanding of the highest objects of the universe. The fact that the philosopher contemplates truths about these most knowable objects constitutes part of Aristotle's case ... for the superiority of this contemplative life to any other. The highest object of knowledge, he thinks, is the unmoved mover, and so he is saying ... that the ultimate end for human beings is to activate their understanding of this foremost cause of the universe.³⁵

It is necessary to appreciate that, for Aristotle, scientific enquiry, the search after truth about the world, is a wholly different activity from *theoria* as he understood this latter activity. The latter, for him, consisted in reflecting upon what has been acquired as a result of having successfully completed this enquiry. Appreciating the difference between these two mental activities permits us to understand a remark about contemplation made by another, earlier eminent Aristotelian scholar which remains wholly unintelligible on Kenny's interpretation of *theoria*. Franz Brentano once remarked that 'the person who is not contemplative seems to me hardly to be alive, and a philosopher who does not use and practice contemplation does not deserve the name; he is no philosopher but a scientific artisan and the most Philistine of Philistines.... I would rather throw my whole profession of learning to the wind, I would even rather die, than give up contemplation.'³⁶ Following Kraut and Brentano, therefore, and *pace* Kenny, *theoria* must be equated with some form of mental activity *other than* scientific enquiry. It was for the sake of being able to engage in this other form of activity that philosophers such as Aristotle and Brentano loved and aspired after theoretical wisdom or

sophia. For the activity in question was that which resulted from the exercise of this virtue.

Kraut's treatment of Aristotle's conception of wisdom forms our third and final case-study. Unlike Kenny, Kraut is acutely aware of just how different from scientific enquiry as presently practised is the activity of *theoria* as it was conceived of by those philosophers like Aristotle who viewed this activity as being that for the sake of which *sophia* is to be pursued and valued. However, even Kraut seems to agree with Kenny that the value of *theoria* is to be thought of as not much diminished when God ceases to be its object. Kraut notes that Aristotle identified three major theoretical disciplines – mathematics, physics and theology or 'first philosophy' as Aristotle sometimes called the last – and that he individuated them in terms of their respectively different objects which were, respectively, numbers, heavenly bodies and God. Kraut rightly points out that 'every argument he [Aristotle] gives for the superiority of first philosophy to moral activity can also be used to show that lesser theoretical activities [of mathematics and physics] are superior to politics'.³⁷ The truth of this observation of Kraut's, however, offers no support for his subsequent assertion that 'Aristotle ... and his contemporaries are most interested in the question whether they should try to do the best they can in the realm of theory or in the realm of practice. By comparison, the question of which theoretical subjects to take up is a side issue'.³⁸

Kraut is correct to claim that the considerations to which Aristotle appeals to show the superiority of contemplating the object(s) of theology to political deliberation might well also establish that contemplating the objects of mathematics and physical enquiry is superior to political deliberation and the plastic arts, such as painting or sculpture. However, that they do hardly suffices to establish that, for Aristotle, it is only a 'side issue' which theoretical objects are most worthy of contemplation. This is very much not the case. Aristotle ranked the various species of contemplation in order of what he took to be the relative value of their respective objects. According to this criterion, the activity of contemplating God turns out to be of incomparably greater value than the activity of contemplating numbers or the heavens. The supremacy of *theoria* which is focused upon God above all other forms of *theoria* was a commonplace among Aristotle and those other philosophers like him who subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy. It formed a major part of their reason for their choosing to be philosophers – that is lovers of wisdom, rather than mathematicians or pure natural scientists. It is absolutely

integral to Aristotle's conception of the human good, and not just a side issue, that it is God, and not anything else, that is the object of that activity of contemplation which Aristotle took to stand at the apex of human activity. Kraut's motive for not acknowledging this fact is, perhaps, revealed when he claims that 'no one can now believe that there is an eternal unmoved mover who does nothing but think'.³⁹ This is very much not the case, as I shall endeavour to argue later. In any case, God cannot be removed from Aristotle's conception of the human good without severely distorting the whole shape and rationale of his ethics. It is like a performance of *Hamlet* without the ghost.

1.4 The betrayal of *sophia*

It is a fact doubtless to be not overly much welcomed that present-day philosophers should have seemingly so much lost sight of the former goal of their subject as to have acquired a very defective understanding of it, in so far as they may be said to have any. Ultimately, how disconcerted anyone should be by the current scale of lack of interest in and concern with the notion of *sophia* or theoretical wisdom depends upon how realistic one considers the prospects of philosophers ever being able to reach such a goal. Theoretical wisdom, I have argued, was and should be equated with the knowledge of why the world exists, including its purpose in so doing, should it have any. There is a sense in which naturalism and anti-realism both equally deny the possibility of any such knowledge, while Christianity only countenances such a form of knowledge in so far as it is based upon, or at least significantly supplemented by, faith in doctrines which purportedly have been acquired by means of revelation rather than ratiocination. As such, it can hardly seem to matter much if present-day philosophers possess a defective understanding of what *sophia* was formerly thought to be, as well as correspondingly more modest aspirations than a desire to acquire it. In sum, in proportion as philosophers today tend to doubt the capacity of unaided reason to establish the existence of God and all that was formerly thought to be knowable about God through reason, so has their conception of theoretical wisdom tended to become emasculated and its value problematic in their eyes.

The question whether *sophia* has been betrayed by present-day philosophy, therefore, turns on how genuinely possible theoretical wisdom is as it was formerly conceived of by those who subscribed to

the classical conception of philosophy. If such a form of wisdom is not possible, then the knowledge that it is not is, perhaps, the deepest story, and wisdom should rightly be equated with knowing there cannot be any! This certainly seems to have been the opinion of Sextus Empiricus, father of scepticism. He wrote:

The reasoning about god seems to be most necessary to those who philosophise dogmatically. Therefore, they say that philosophy is the cultivation of wisdom and wisdom is the knowledge of divine and human matters. For this reason, if we show the doubtful nature of the investigation concerning gods, we will have implicitly established that wisdom is not the knowledge of divine and human matters and that philosophy is not the cultivation of wisdom.⁴⁰

What follows is an attempt to decide on the legitimacy or otherwise of the case for the classical conception of philosophy. Should, as I will seek to argue, this case be stronger than is the case against this conception of philosophy, then those currently engaged in the study and teaching of philosophy are in need of a profound reorientation in their conception of what it is they should be about in their professional activities in order for them to do justice to what it is they are professed to be engaged in teaching and studying.

The order of my enquiry will be as follows. In the next chapter, I provide a historical overview of the classical conception and of the main arguments advanced on its behalf by its two most well-known exponents, Plato and Aristotle. In Chapter 3, I critically examine the main objections which have been levelled against those two philosophical arguments for theism on which the classical conception has always been principally reliant. As will have become apparent from the present chapter, the classical conception of philosophy is at variance not only with the two currently dominant forms of philosophy, naturalism and anti-realism, which both tend to be agnostic or atheistic in character. It is also at variance ultimately with all religions like Christianity which appeal to revelation. Although the classical conception can join company with Christianity and the other monotheistic religions to defend theism against the assault upon it made by naturalists and anti-realists, it must eventually part company with all these religions over the truth-content of revelation. In Chapter 4, we examine the case of these religions against philosophy for being supposed the ultimate source of wisdom. Here I shall be concerned to defend the pagan form of the classical conception

against Christianity and all other forms of organised religion which appeal to revelation. After that, we shall conclude our enquiry by drawing some lessons from it about the nature and goal of philosophy.

2

The Classical Conception of Philosophy

2.1 Philosophy as quest for *sophia*

As with many other academic disciplines, such as mathematics, physics and history, and unlike some others, for example, literary studies and drama, philosophy is one whose practitioners purport to be concerned with the discovery of truth and the advancement of knowledge. Unlike the other truth-seeking disciplines, however, philosophy is one whose practitioners have never ceased to be closely preoccupied with the remote history of their subject. However often, from time to time, philosophers may have declared themselves intent upon breaking free from the incubus of the past, resolving to start afresh, just as often others have claimed to have derived inspiration from, or have declared themselves invigorated by, a return to the writings of their predecessors. No philosophical writings have proved more inspirational for later generations than those from the period of classical antiquity in which the subject was born. For some latter-day philosophers, for example Martin Heidegger, it has been the fragments from one or more of the pre-Socratics which have proved to be of most inspiration – in Heidegger's case, those attributed to Parmenides. More typically, it has been the writings of Plato and Aristotle which have proved of most inspiration to later generations. Few philosophers of whatever period or persuasion have failed to be moved and inspired by the example of Socrates.

The twentieth century proved no exception to this rule. Twice during that century, philosophers were momentarily wont to shelve their ancient, and, often, not so ancient, philosophy texts, going on to proclaim themselves entirely free from all the various misconceptions of the past under which they claimed their predecessors had

laboured and which had allegedly vitiated practically all their endeavours. The first such occasion was during the heyday of logical positivism in the thirties; the second in that brief interlude during the fifties and sixties when the influence of such iconoclasts as Ludwig Wittgenstein and J. L. Austen was at its height. Since then, philosophers have returned with a vengeance to the study of the history of their subject. Today, there is scarcely a past great philosopher whose thought has not been disinterred and subjected to the closest of examinations.

What is to be made of the recurrent preoccupation by philosophers with the thought of their predecessors is debatable. Some will be inclined to welcome it, viewing the history of this subject as offering an unending stimulus to thought as well as an inexhaustible source of insight. They will be likely to agree with Alfred North Whitehead that the history of the subject is no more than but a series of footnotes to Plato. Doubtless, others will look with less favour on the fascination which philosophers have for the remote history of their subject. They will prefer instead to regard the preoccupation of philosophers with the thought of their predecessors as signifying nothing more than that, as a discipline, philosophy is one in which no significant progress towards the discovery of truth can be made.

For a long time during the twentieth century, philosophers have been simultaneously both proud of and fascinated by their ancient Greek heritage, while at the same time acutely embarrassed by and disparaging of much of it. They are prepared to regard the doctrines and supporting arguments advanced by such figures as Plato and Aristotle as being every bit as subtle and worthy of serious consideration as any that have been propounded since. At the same time, much that is apparently quite central to the thought of these early thinkers has been found quite alien by their latter-day counterparts and unworthy of their serious consideration. A striking feature of much of the present-day interest shown in the history of philosophy is just how selective it has been in terms of what receives serious consideration. It is as if a careful process of screening goes on to screen out from consideration any past preoccupations that do not correspond with current ones.

Foremost among the casualties of the highly selective attention which recent philosophers have given to the history of their subject, especially to ancient Greek philosophy, is that corpus of doctrines which comprises what I am calling the classical conception of philosophy. Some modern scholars, it is true, have been only too acutely

aware of just how ubiquitous this conception of philosophy was in ancient times. For example, the author of a classic twentieth-century study of conversion has noted of philosophy during antiquity that 'any philosophy of th[at] time set up a standard of values different from those of the world outside and could serve as a stimulus to a stern life. ... [B]ut asceticism requires a positive complement. ... *Commonly the complement for the deeper student of philosophy was the joy of contemplation*' (my emphasis).¹ That such an elevated purpose originally belonged to philosophy is a thesis that has rightly been insisted on by the French historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot. He has observed that '[p]hilosophy ... appears in its original aspect not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way. It is an attempt to transform mankind.'²

Hadot has always been at pains to emphasise how

philosophy in antiquity was a spiritual exercise. ... [P]hilosophical theories were either placed explicitly in the service of spiritual practice, as was the case in Stoicism and Epicureanism, or else they were taken as the objects of ... a practice of the contemplative life which, in the last analysis, was itself nothing other than a spiritual exercise. ... [T]he works of ancient philosophers ... are the products of a philosophical school, in the most concrete sense of the term, in which a master forms his disciples, trying to guide them to self-transformation and -realisation. ... [A]ll philosophical schools engaged their disciples upon a new way of life ... : one was to renounce the false values of wealth, honours, and pleasures, and turn towards the true values of virtue, contemplation, a simple lifestyle and the simple happiness of existing.³

Hadot argues that an appreciation of the original spiritual character and goal of Greek philosophy became lost through the transformation which the subject underwent as a result of its encounter with and partial absorption by Christianity. As a result of this encounter, claims Hadot, philosophy ceased to be the spiritual quest it originally once was, becoming instead the 'abstract-theoretical affair' it now is. Of this change in philosophy, Hadot claims that:

It seems to be the result of the absorption of *philosophia* by Christianity. Since its inception, Christianity has presented itself as a *philosophia*, in so far as it assimilated into itself the traditional practise of spiritual exercises. ... [P]hilosophy was emptied of its

spiritual exercises which, from now on, were relegated to Christian mysticism and ethics. Reduced to the rank of 'handmaid of theology', philosophy's role was henceforth to furnish theology with conceptual – and hence purely theoretical – material. When, in the modern age, philosophy regained its autonomy, it still retained many features inherited from this medieval conception. In particular, it maintained its purely theoretical character... [C]ontemporary historians of ancient thought have, as a general rule, remained prisoners of the old, purely theoretical conception of philosophy.⁴

It is possible to specify in much further detail than Hadot does the nature of the activity of contemplation which, as Hadot correctly points out, was among the principal goals for the sake of which philosophy was undertaken in classical times. I shall now endeavour to show that there grew up in classical antiquity a distinct philosophical tradition, which can be traced back at least as far as Plato, which commended the subject primarily for the sake of the knowledge of God in which it was supposed to issue. According to this tradition, such knowledge was considered worthy of pursuit primarily for the sake of its facilitating the activity of contemplating God with which activity the *summum bonum* or supreme human good was equated. Plato and Aristotle were both very much part of this tradition, if not its ultimate progenitors. Until comparatively recent times, this fact about them was well known and appreciated by all who claimed their thought to have been deeply influenced by them. Sadly, it is scarcely appreciated today, even by their most erudite present-day expositors and scholars. Some notable experts in Greek philosophy have been fully aware of and have commented on this fact, as they have on the way this fact has come to be lost sight of. Werner Jaeger, for example, points out that 'Greek philosophy had been a means of recognising "the Divine" from its very beginnings, a fact of which our modern history of Greek philosophy has lost sight almost entirely during the era of positivism and naturalism ...'.⁵ I shall now attempt to show just how ubiquitous was this conception of philosophy in classical antiquity.

2.2 Plato on the form of the good

It is seldom appreciated today just how central a role ancient Greek philosophy assigned to God. As the author of a comparatively recent survey of natural theology in ancient Greek philosophy has observed,

Philosophical theology ... [is] at the heart of Greek philosophy. When Aristotle identified wisdom with *logos* about the gods, he was not expressing an idiosyncratic and pious sentiment, but rather giving a kind of thumb-nail description of what the enterprise of Greek philosophy was as understood both by his contemporaries and his predecessors.... [W]ith certain qualifications, this description holds for Greek philosophy after Aristotle as well.⁶

One obstacle in the way of a proper appreciation of the classical conception of philosophy today is the common presumption that, since the philosophers of classical antiquity were prepared to countenance a *plurality* of gods, it follows that they could not have been genuinely monotheistic in outlook. In one sense of the term, of course, monotheism *is* incompatible with a recognition of or belief in a plurality of gods. Since the ancient Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, were prepared to recognise such a plurality of gods, it is a mistake to regard them as monotheist in that sense. However, that sense of the term is not necessarily its most important or illuminating one. As Etienne Gilson has pointed out,⁷ the reason the ancient Greeks acknowledged a plurality of gods was because, initially at least, they were disposed to interpret the world animistically. As a result, each of the innumerable natural forces which exercised any significant influence over their lives was viewed by the ancient Greeks as the manifestation of some non-human living being. Since, to the Greeks, any living being who lorded it over the lives of other less powerful beings had the status of being a god to those lesser beings, the Greeks were led to regard as separate divinities each of the non-human animate beings whom they postulated as exercising influence over their lives. This notion of a god, however, is perfectly compatible with the recognition of some one single being as supreme and the creator and ultimate sovereign of all other gods. Such was the concept of God which belonged to those ancient Greek philosophers who first formulated and espoused the classical conception of philosophy. If by the term 'monotheism' we mean simply the belief in some such being, then these philosophers *were* monotheists.

In the sense in which I have just explained the term, it was by no means only after Aristotle that Greek philosophers began to espouse monotheism and to equate theoretical wisdom with knowledge of the existence of such a supreme transcendent being. Although little has been preserved of the writings of the pre-Socratics, it is known that, among them, Xenophanes postulated the existence of a transcendent

mind or *nous* as the cause of the world. The following pair of fragments preserved from his writings indicate that he adopted a monotheistic outlook. 'There is one god, greatest among men and gods, in no way similar to mortals in body or in thought.' 'It stays always in the same place, not moving, nor is it fitting for it to pass to different places at different times; rather, exempt from toil, it shakes all things with the thought of its mind.'⁸ Similarly, in his memoirs of Socrates, Xenophon relates that Socrates asserted of the deity that He 'sees all things and hears all things, and is present in all places and heedful of all things' and that He 'implanted in [man] the noblest type of soul ... [that he may] apprehend the existence of gods who set in order the universe'.⁹

The extant writings of the pre-Socratics are so fragmentary, and Socrates' own views are so difficult to disentangle from those views of his erstwhile pupil, Plato, our main source of knowledge about his teacher, that my reconstruction of the tradition shall begin with Plato. Almost his entire *œuvre* has been preserved virtually intact and his influence upon the course of subsequent western philosophy has been greater than that of any other philosopher.

Despite the vast quantity of his writings that we possess, Plato's views on a range of subjects are notoriously difficult to discern with any degree of precision or accuracy. As the historian of ideas, Arthur Lovejoy, once observed, 'unhappily, when one attempts to set forth the essentials of Plato's philosophy today one is confronted at the outset with the radical differences of opinion among learned specialists concerning ... what ... doctrines were held by Plato himself'.¹⁰ On no question about Plato do Lovejoy's remarks hold more true than whether Plato may be said to have subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy, as I have defined it, in its entirety. On one level, to suppose that he did can seem very compelling and relatively uncontroversial. Plato clearly conceives the goal of philosophy to be the acquisition of *sophia* or theoretical wisdom which he, further, clearly equates with having an ultimate explanation of the world, including its broad form and purpose. It is also clear that, for Plato, what ultimately explains the world and the form it has is some extramundane, super-sensible and transcendent entity only accessible to philosophers in the activity of whose contemplation supreme human happiness is said to reside. It is also reasonably clear and uncontroversial that, in at least some of his writings, Plato is prepared to claim the world and its form to be the creation of a divine Being whom Plato calls the *Demiurge* and who bears a close resemblance to the Judaeo-

Christian God. Despite all these respects in which Plato appears to have subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy, it remains controversial to impute this conception of philosophy to Plato *in toto*. This is because to many of Plato's expositors it has always seemed that what Plato regards as being the explanation of the world and the supreme object of philosophical knowledge and contemplation is not God but another super-sensible and transcendent entity which he posits which he calls *the form of the good*. If such commentators are correct, then Plato cannot be regarded as having subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy in its entirety.

It would be safe to impute the classical conception of philosophy in its entirety to Plato were it possible to construe him as having intended the expression 'the form of the good' to be understood as referring to God. To construe him so, however, has always been deeply problematic. Lovejoy once observed, 'interpreters of Plato in both ancient and modern times have endlessly disputed over the question whether this conception of the absolute Good was for him identical with the conception of God'.¹¹ A formidable body of expositors of Plato, which include no less an authority on Plato than his erstwhile pupil, Aristotle, deny the validity of this equation.¹² Their most decisive objection to supposing that Plato so intended the expression is that God and the forms appear to belong to different ontological categories from one another. God is an individual, albeit a unique and very special one, whereas forms, including that of the good, are universals. Consequently, so it is concluded, God could not have been that which Plato had in mind when he spoke of the form of the good. According to those who argue so, what we are to suppose Plato intended to refer to when he spoke of 'the form of the good' was not God. It was, rather, a concrete universal that is partially instantiated by each particular good individual and is wholly instantiated by the organic whole formed by the totality of all good individuals. Those who prefer this interpretation of the form of the good to its equation with God include Richard Lewis Nettleship,¹³ John Rowan,¹⁴ Richard Hare¹⁵ and J. C. B. Gosling.¹⁶ Despite the pedigree of this interpretation, I shall now argue against it and in favour of the equation. Because my preferred interpretation is somewhat heterodox and because so much turns on the issue, I shall proceed very cautiously in developing my case on its behalf.

L. P. Gerson offers the following succinct statement of the primary objection to equating the form of the good with God. '[T]he demiurge is *nous* and the Forms are *noeta*'.¹⁷ For Gerson, this difference between

the Demiurge and the forms suffices to establish that no form can be identical with any *nous* or mind, and hence that no form can be identical with God. In so arguing, Gerson is surely correct. However, despite forms being *noeta* in the sense of being *objects* of thought rather than *thinkers* of them, it still remains possible nonetheless that minds, or, more specifically, some mind, can be the object of thought in the sense of being that about which people think. Moreover, in the case of such a unique particular as God, it is not altogether implausible to suppose that Plato might have chosen to refer to it obliquely by means of an expression which strictly speaking designates not it, but rather some property which belongs uniquely to it. Plato might have chosen such an oblique mode of referring to God, if the property mentioned as a way of referring to God was important enough to warrant being used in this way as a method of referring to Him. An analogy would be the use of the term 'the Stagarite' as a way of referring to Aristotle, the philosopher being the only person of note from that part of the world.

My proposed way of salvaging the equation seems to break down in face of the fact that there are clearly many particulars besides God which are good. The equation could still be salvaged, however, were it possible to construe the expression, 'the form of the good', as having been intended to be an ellipsis for the longer expression 'the form of that which is wholly and supremely good'. My proposal is that this is how the expression should be interpreted. God, for Plato, is unique among good particulars in being wholly and supremely good. So, if Plato had used the expression 'the form of the good' as an ellipsis for the expression 'the form of that which is wholly and supremely good', then it could have been God to whom Plato was intending to refer when employing that expression. My proposal is that when he used the expression 'the form of the good' to refer to that item which, he claims, both explains the world and is the supreme object of philosophical wisdom, he should be so understood. In short, the expression should be understood as referring to the very same entity he elsewhere calls 'the Demiurge' and who corresponds with the Judaeo-Christian God.

My proposed interpretation of how we should construe the expression 'the form of the good' is not the currently received one. Notwithstanding this, my proposed interpretation enables far better sense to be made of what Plato wrote about the form of the good than do rival interpretations. On its behalf, considerable textual support may be adduced. This comes not just from the *Republic*, where the

expression is introduced and receives its most extensive employment, but from two later dialogues as well, namely, the *Philebus* and the *Timaeus*. I shall now rehearse the support for my interpretation that is provided by these three dialogues.

Of all Plato's dialogues, the *Republic* is deservedly the most famous. It takes the form of a lengthy response on the part of Socrates, the principal speaker within it, to a challenge put to him at its start by the two other principal interlocutors in it, Plato's brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. They challenge Socrates to demonstrate that no one can ever possibly improve on their prospects of personal happiness by committing any act of injustice. Socrates is challenged to prove this without appealing to any of the customary rewards and punishments bestowed on individuals by others for their supposedly having acted justly or unjustly. All such considerations are said to show is that a person benefits from *seeming* just in the eyes of others not from *being* just. These two things are by no means identical. Socrates is challenged instead to prove that it never pays to act unjustly solely through reference to the respective effects which just and unjust conduct have upon the minds of those who engage in these forms of conduct.

Socrates commences his task by observing that to meet the challenge it is necessary that he and his interlocutors first gain a clear understanding of what justice is. Only then will they be in a position to identify and compare the respective effects which just and unjust conduct have upon the minds of those who engage in them. Socrates points out that, since political societies, as well as individuals, are capable of being deemed just or unjust, and since societies are much larger entities than individuals, it should be easier for them to discern wherein justice consists through inspecting a society known to possess this quality than by their inspecting some individual known to possess justice. Hence, he proposes to his interlocutors that they should begin by first constructing in their imagination a perfect or ideal state or community. Being perfect, such a form of society can be known to possess every virtue or perfection and hence can be known *a priori* to be just. Hence, by reflecting on it, Socrates suggests, it will be possible for them to discern wherein its justice lies and thereby to ascertain in what justice consists. Socrates then constructs his ideal society and from it extracts his notorious definition of justice as a form of minding one's own business with whose rationale and details we need not be concerned.

Socrates is drawn into discussing of the form of the good through

being invited to say how realistic he considers the chances are of such a form of ideal society ever coming into being. Socrates responds by remarking that

[t]he society we have described can never grow into a reality or see the light of day, and there will be no end to the troubles of states ... [or] of humanity itself, till philosophers become kings in this world, or till those we now call kings and rulers truly become philosophers... [w]hile the many natures now content to follow either to the exclusion of the other are forcibly debarred from doing so.¹⁸

To justify his answer, Socrates is drawn into discussing the nature of philosophy. It is in the course of this discussion that Plato introduces the notion of the form of the good.

A philosopher, according to Socrates, is someone with a driving passion for wisdom of every kind without distinction. He observes, 'The man who is ready to taste every form of knowledge, is glad to learn and never satisfied – he's the man who deserves to be called a philosopher....'¹⁹ Glaucon responds by urging Socrates to explain how this passion serves to differentiate the philosopher from theatre-goers or other art lovers all of whom are every bit as eager as any philosopher is to acquaint themselves with every particular which is the object of their respective master passion, be these plays or sculptures. Socrates answers that the philosopher differs from the art lover ultimately in being interested only in abstract forms rather than any of the individual particulars in which these forms are exemplified. 'Those who love looking and listening are delighted by beautiful sounds and colours and shapes, and the works of art which make use of them, but their minds are incapable of seeing and delighting in the essential nature of beauty itself.'²⁰ By contrast, any interest which a philosopher might have in particulars, for example, in beautiful objects, stems ultimately only from an interest in the forms that these particular things exemplify. It is only those whose primary interest is in forms who can truly be described as lovers of wisdom and hence as philosophers. This is because, strictly speaking, it is *forms only*, and not the particular things in which forms are exemplified, that can be objects of knowledge. Particular things only admit of being objects of belief. Consequently, only those whose master passion interests them in forms and not particulars can qualify for being supposed genuine lovers of wisdom.

Socrates' argument here relies on several premises. First, wisdom involves knowledge. Second, only exceptionless and timelessly true generalisations merit the title 'knowledge'. Third, only descriptions of the natures or essences of different kinds of thing can offer exceptionless and timelessly true generalisations. Fourth, the only way in which it is possible to discover the truth of any exceptionless and timelessly true generalisation is by means of acquaintance with and inspection of some form or universal, all generalisations derived from induction of the data provided by sense perception of particulars being subject to exception.

Armed with his conception of the philosopher as someone interested in universals or forms, Socrates is able to explain why his ideal society is capable of being realised when and only when it is governed by philosophers. The love of wisdom which distinguishes the genuine philosopher from others is not just one among a number of their different likes and interests. In the case of a genuine philosopher, the love of wisdom is paramount among his desires, prompting the philosopher to embark on an all-absorbing quest. Anyone in whom the love of wisdom reigns supreme among their passions, it is claimed, will necessarily acquire *en passant* all the moral qualities needed in a good ruler. Because a philosopher loves knowledge, the philosopher will love the truth and hence be truthful. Because his love of knowledge is paramount among his desires, the philosopher's other passions and appetites will abate in strength, thereby rendering him self-controlled and temperate. As a result, the philosopher will not be concerned with wealth and, hence, will not be miserly. The philosopher will also be free from cowardice, because 'ha[ving] greatness of mind and breadth of vision to contemplate all time and reality, he can[not] regard human life as a thing of great consequence ... [and] so he won't think death anything to be afraid of'.²¹ Finally, since the foregoing virtues will remove from their possessor any motive for any act of injustice or unpleasantness in his dealings with others, the philosopher will be just in dealings with others. As Socrates puts it, 'a well-balanced man, who is neither mean nor ungenerous nor boastful nor cowardly, can hardly be difficult to deal with or unjust'.²² In sum, a cultivated philosophical disposition endows its possessor with all the moral qualities necessary in a ruler to ensure he does not abuse his position of power.

It is not just possession of all the moral qualities necessary in a ruler in which the love of wisdom will necessarily issue, when cultivated rightly. In addition, when satisfied by means of an appropriate course

of education, the love of wisdom will result in its possessor acquiring such knowledge as makes for good governance. For Socrates, a philosopher became qualified to rule only after having completed the full course of education to which the love of wisdom will naturally impel him. This course of education results in the acquisition of extensive knowledge of the forms, including, most importantly, knowledge of the form of the good. Plato considers such a form of knowledge to be an indispensable prerequisite for the creation and maintenance of an ideal society. This is because, in constructing an ideal society, it will be necessary for the philosopher-ruler to 'look ... frequently ... at ... justice and beauty and self-discipline and the like in their true nature, and again at the copy of them he is trying to make in human beings.... He ... will ... go on till he has made human nature as acceptable to God as may be.'²³ To create an ideal society and preserve it in being, the rulers of this society must have a clear notion of each of the various virtues which it is to instantiate so as to be able to refer to these notions in deliberating how to structure and regulate the society they rule over. Only philosophers have such knowledge.

For Plato, the knowledge needed by a ruler to rule well ultimately requires knowledge of the form of the good. He writes, 'the highest form of knowledge is knowledge of the form of the good, from which things that are just and so on derive their usefulness and value.... [I]f ... ignorant of it, the rest of our knowledge, however, perfect, can be of no benefit to us.'²⁴ About this object of knowledge, Socrates claims,

The good is the end of all endeavour, the object on which every heart is set, whose existence it divines, though it finds it difficult to grasp just what it is.... Can we possibly agree that the best of our citizens, to whom we are going to entrust everything, should be in the dark about so important a subject?... At any rate a man will not be a very useful Guardian of what is right and fair if he does not know in what their goodness consists.... [S]o our society will be properly regulated only if it is in the charge of a Guardian who has this knowledge.²⁵

Of *what* precisely did Plato consider knowledge of the good to be knowledge? What exactly did he understand by 'the form of the good'? Plato makes clear that he attaches supreme importance to this item. Of the form of the good, Socrates is made to remark, '[i]f we are ignorant of it the rest of our knowledge, however perfect, can be of no

benefit to us'.²⁶ Despite this, Socrates declines to supply any account of the form of the good on the grounds of ignorance. Notwithstanding his apparent reluctance to provide an explicit account of the form of the good, Plato drops enough hints in the *Republic* to suggest that it is God and nothing else to which he is referring when talking of the form of the good. No fewer than three passages from that work can be cited in support of this contention.

The first passage occurs immediately after Socrates confesses himself to be unable to define the form of the good. He offers instead an account of something which he describes as 'a child of the good ... and to resemble it closely'.²⁷ This turns out to be the sun. Clearly it makes perfect sense for God to be regarded as being the cause of the sun. Indeed, in the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge is explicitly claimed to be such. If, as I have proposed, we interpret the term 'the good' as being an ellipsis for 'the Supreme and Perfect Good', it becomes perfectly intelligible why Plato chose to call the sun the child of the good. He did so because, for Plato, it is God and only God who is supremely and perfectly good. It remains wholly baffling why Plato should have chosen to call the sun a child of the good were the term 'the good' to have been intended to refer to anything other than God. Consider such an understanding of this term as is proposed by authors such as Hare and Gosling according to whom it means, roughly speaking, an organic whole formed from the totality of all natural beings when they have reached their state of full maturity.²⁸ How could any such totality be supposed to be *causally responsible* for the existence of the sun? If anything, the causal link between the sun and the members of this totality flows the other way.

The second passage from the *Republic* which supports my proposed interpretation of the form of the good occurs when Socrates is explaining the way in which the sun resembles the form of the good. He claims the good to be 'the source not only of the intelligibility of the objects of knowledge, but also of their existence and reality'.²⁹ Supposing Plato intended the term 'the form of the good' to refer to God, it makes perfect sense why he should have chosen to describe the good as the cause of the existence of the various objects of knowledge. For the objects of knowledge, for Plato, are the various forms, including, of course, the form of the good itself. It makes perfect sense to describe God as being the creator of the various natural kinds exemplified by particular things as well as being the cause of Himself in so far as nothing besides God is responsible for His existence. When otherwise interpreted, however, little sense can be made of Plato's

claim that the good is the cause of the objects of knowledge. Consider the suggestion that the form of the good be equated with (the notion of) the totality of all individuals in their fully realised states. How could any such totality of individuals, or even the notion of any such totality, be supposed itself to be the cause of the various individuals which together form that totality? Such a totality has no prior or independent existence to that which belongs to the individuals who compose it. It is equally difficult to see how the mere notion of any such a totality of particulars could by itself bring into being the particulars of which this notion is the notion. Neither the totality of any set of particulars, nor the notion of such totality, can plausibly be supposed to cause the existence of the individuals which form that totality.

The third passage from the *Republic* which supports my proposal that Plato intended the expression 'the form of the good' to refer to God occurs just after Socrates begins his account of the education of the philosopher. Socrates begins his treatment of this subject by claiming that 'the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good'.³⁰ Socrates then remarks that, in the best ordered of states, it is the job of the rulers 'to compel the best minds to attain what we have called the highest form of knowledge, and to ascend to the vision of the good'.³¹ When Plato is read as using the term 'the form of the good' as an oblique way of referring to God, it makes perfect sense why he should here assert the form of the good to be the highest of all realities. For, given that God is the cause of the various forms, it makes perfect sense to describe God so. Interpreted otherwise, however, for example equating the good with the totality of all natural beings in their natural end-states, it becomes wholly unclear why Plato should have wished to claim the good to be any brighter or higher than any of the other forms. For on this alternative interpretation, the form of the good simply is the notion of the entire set of individuals in their natural end-states. Being no more than the aggregate of these individuals in their respective states of perfection, the good can have no higher reality than any – or, at most, than all – of them. This is not so when the good is taken to be a transcendent God who is the cause of all the forms. In sum, when Plato is understood to have intended to be referring to God when he spoke of the form of the good, far better sense can be made of Plato's various assertions in the *Republic* about the form of the good than can otherwise be made.

Further support for my proposed way of construing what Plato intended by the expression, 'the form of the good' can be found in the *Philebus*, which dialogue is widely held to have been next in order of composition after the *Republic*. In this dialogue, Socrates is depicted as attacking hedonism, the view that equates the good with pleasure. In the dialogue, Philebus is represented as the author of the view, but the view is defended by Protarchus who is Socrates' principal interlocutor in this dialogue. In opposition to hedonism, Socrates sets forth a more intellectualist conception of the good in which it is equated with thought and knowledge. As a step in his argument, Socrates elicits the agreement of Protarchus that a life which combines pleasure with insight is better than one which contains only pleasure. From this admission, Socrates extracts from Protarchus the further admission that pleasure cannot be the sole intrinsic good. Socrates responds to this admission of Protarchus' by remarking, 'that is enough to show that, at least, one should not identify the good with Philebus' goddess'. It is clear from the context that, by the expression 'Philebus' goddess' Socrates is intending to refer to that which Philebus has claimed to be the sole intrinsic good – namely, pleasure.

Up to this point in the dialogue, Philebus has been listening to the discussion in silence. He now interjects to remark that the argument which Socrates has just employed to refute hedonism and to support the superiority of a mixed life also counts with equal force against Socrates' own declared intellectualist conception of the good. Philebus observes, 'nor is your intelligence the good, Socrates. The same objections hold against it.' To this comment of Philebus, Socrates jokingly replies, 'Perhaps that's true of *my* intelligence, Philebus, but I think the case is different with a truly divine intelligence.'³²

As in all other instances of humour, that which is contained in Socrates' reply depends upon its simultaneously operating with more than one layer of meaning. At the superficial level, in replying as he does, Socrates pretends to have misunderstood Philebus' remark as having been intended to be imputing to Socrates the obviously ludicrous equation of the supreme good with his, that is, Socrates' own, intelligence. In his reply, Socrates good-humouredly agrees with Philebus that his argument against hedonism also succeeds in refuting this ludicrous equation, not that Socrates had for a minute either espoused it or seriously thinks Philebus thought he had ever done so.

At a deeper level, Socrates' reply conveys the following more serious thought. However correct Philebus might be in claiming that Socrates' argument against hedonism counts equally against the goodness of a

life of intelligence unmixed with pleasure, this holds true only in the case of human beings. That Socrates' argument against hedonism equally refutes the view that an unmixed life of intelligence is best for human beings does not establish that such a life of pure insight enjoyed by a divine intelligence might not be intrinsically better than the mixed life that is best in the case of human beings. Therefore, the supreme goodness of any such divine intelligence has not been at all compromised by the force of the argument which Socrates has advanced in refutation of hedonism. In other words, the humour that is contained in Socrates' reply to Philebus depends upon Socrates deliberately employing the term 'the good' simultaneously in two distinct and different senses. In the first of these senses, the expression refers to the human good; in the second, it refers to the supreme good. It thus remains possible for a mixed life to be the human good, in the sense of being the best life that human beings can lead, without such a life constituting the divine good, that is, the life that is best for a divine intelligence. It, thus, remains possible to equate the supreme good with a divine intelligence, but not with any particular human intelligence, even that belonging to Socrates. If I am correct about what thoughts lie behind Socrates' response to Philebus, then what he says here by way of reply supports my claim that, by the term 'the form of the good' as it figures in the *Republic*, Plato intended to refer to that which Plato considers to be the *supreme* good, namely, God.

Further corroboration for my interpretation comes from the *Timaeus*. This dialogue recounts a supposed conversation of Socrates on the day following that on which the conversation depicted in the *Republic* supposedly occurred. In this dialogue, the principal speaker and mouthpiece for Plato's own views is not Socrates, but Timaeus who is introduced to Socrates as someone 'who knows more about astronomy than the rest of us ... ha[ving] devoted himself particularly to the study of the nature of the universe'.³³ Timaeus is invited to provide an account of 'the origin of the cosmic system bring[ing] the story down to man',³⁴ which task Timaeus undertakes with great relish.

Timaeus begins by laying down two postulates. The first is a distinction between two different sorts of entity. The first is 'that which always is and never becomes'. Entities of this sort neither come into being nor pass away. They are said to be apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning. The second sort of entity is 'that which is always becoming but never is'. Entities of this sort are said to be the objects of opinion and irrational sensation.³⁵ From the context, it is

clear that the first sort of entity are the forms, while occupants of the physical universe are entities of the second sort. Timaeus' second postulate is a variant of the principle of universal causality. 'Everything that becomes or changes must do so owing to some cause; for nothing can come to be without a cause.'³⁶

Armed with his two postulates, Timaeus proceeds to enquire whether the world – or cosmos – has always existed without a beginning, or whether it has come into existence and started from some beginning. His unequivocal answer is that the world 'has come into being; for it is visible, tangible, and corporeal, and therefore perceptible by the senses, and, ... sensible things ... come into being'.³⁷ From the second of his two postulates, together with his claim that the world has come into being, Timaeus infers that the world must owe its existence to the causal activity of some *nous* or mind who stands outside the world and who fashioned it in conformity with some model or plan in mind. Timaeus next enquires after the character of the pattern or model which the world-designing mind employed in creating the world. He asks, 'To which pattern did its constructor work, that which remains the same and unchanging or that which comes to be?'³⁸ Timaeus answers, not surprisingly, that the pattern to which the creator of the world appealed in creating the world came from the world of what is eternal and unchanging. Timaeus' grounds for this claim are that the physical world is beautiful. 'If the world is beautiful, clearly he [the designer] had his eye on the eternal.'³⁹

Were Plato to have intended the term 'the form of the good' to refer to the totality of all particulars in their realised end-states, one might have expected Timaeus at this point to cite the notion of such a totality as being the model to which the world-creating mind referred in fashioning the world. However, Plato gives a different specification of the model which lends considerable further support for my proposal that we equate the form of the good with God. Timaeus tells us that the model to which the world-designing mind referred in creating the world was nothing other than the world-creating mind himself. We are further told that what led the world-creating mind to create a physical universe upon the model of himself was his very own goodness which resulted in his desiring that everything be as similar as possible to himself. The model to which the world-creating mind referred in creating the world turns out to be, then, not a totality of timeless universals, but the world-creating mind itself. Of the designer-mind, Timaeus asserts, 'He was good, and what is good has no particle of envy in it; being therefore without envy he wished all

things to be as like himself as possible.⁴⁰ It is worth remarking in parenthesis that, because the world-creating mind employed himself as his model in creating the physical universe, the latter turns out on Timaeus' view of it to be, rather surprisingly, a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence of its own.

In portraying the designer-mind himself as serving as his model in creating the world, and in citing his goodness as his reason for creating the world in his likeness, the *Timaeus* provides striking further corroboration in support of my proposal that we should interpret Plato as having intended the expression 'the form of the good', as an oblique way of referring to the supremely good divine creator of the world. This is because, on my proposal, the 'form of the good' refers to the notion which the divine intellect would have had of itself and to which it would have been referring as a model in creating the world in His likeness.

In the immensely scholarly running commentary which accompanies his translation of the *Timaeus*, Francis Cornford advances an interpretation of Plato diametrically opposed to my own. Cornford's interpretation differs from mine in two main respects. First, Cornford denies that the Demiurge can be likened in any plausible way to the God of Judaeo-Christian monotheism. He writes:

The Demiurge ... must not be equated with the one God of the Bible, who created the world out of nothing and is the supreme object of worship. Still less is there the slightest warrant in Greek thought of the pre-Christian centuries for the notion of 'overflowing love', or love of any kind, prompting a god to make a world. It is not fair either to Plato or to the New Testament to ascribe the most characteristic revelations of the Founder of Christianity to a pagan polytheist. ... [T]he Demiurge ... is mythical in that he is not really a creator god, distinct from the universe he is represented as making.⁴¹

Second, Cornford denies that the Demiurge himself should be understood as being that which serves the Demiurge as his model in creating the physical universe and in whose likeness it was created. Instead, argues Cornford, we should understand the Demiurge's model to be something which Cornford translates as 'the intelligible living creature'. Cornford describes this as a generic form of a particular which includes within itself all possible specific life-forms. He writes:

The visible world ... has for its original a complex form ... called 'the intelligible Living Creature'. This is a generic Form containing within itself the Forms of all subordinate species.... It is an eternal and unchanging object of thought, not itself *a* living creature, any more than the form of Man is a man. It is not a soul.... We have no warrant for identifying it with the entire system of Forms, or with the form of the Good in the *Republic*.... The model, as strictly eternal, is independent of the Demiurge.... [T]his model is one among the objects of its thought.⁴²

Should Cornford be correct about either of these two matters, my proposal about how we should understand Plato when he speaks of the 'form of the good' falls to the ground, as does my case for imputing to Plato in its entirety the classical conception of philosophy. In defence of my proffered interpretation of Plato, and against Cornford's, I wish to offer the following two remarks about Cornford's views. So far as the first is concerned, it is difficult to see why the presence of lesser divinities in Plato's cosmology, and their absence from the cosmology of Judaism and Christianity, should be thought to undermine the similarity between Plato's Demiurge and the God of Judaism and Christianity. Both are conceived as being creators of the world and the form it possesses. Both are conceived as being supremely good and as Beings in whose contemplation the final and highest human good consists. Admittedly, Cornford's main reason for denying their similarity is less the presence within Plato's schema of lesser divinities than the fact that, unlike the God of Judaism and Christianity, Plato's Demiurge is portrayed, not as having created the world *ex nihilo*, but merely as having imposed cosmic order on a pre-existent material chaos. In Cornford's view, this seriously limits the amount of power which the Demiurge is supposed to possess and renders him far less powerful than the omnipotent Judaeo-Christian God. However, even were Cornford correct in supposing Plato's Demiurge far less powerful than the Judaeo-Christian God, this would not stop there being very important similarities between them.

So far as concerns the identity of the model to which the Demiurge referred in creating the world, there seems to be, *pace* Cornford, little evidence to suppose it was not the Demiurge Himself. To see why this is so, compare Cornford's translation of the passage in which Plato reveals the identity of the Demiurge's model with the translation offered by Desmond Lee. Cornford's translation runs, 'What was the living creature in whose likeness he framed the world? ... Let us ... say

the world is like ... that Living creature of which all other living creatures, severally and in their families, are parts.'⁴³ Lee's translation of the same passage runs as follows, 'What was the living being in the likeness of which the creator constructed it? ... Let us assume that it resembles as nearly as possible that of which all other beings individually and generically are parts, and which comprises in itself all intelligible beings.'⁴⁴ Nowhere in Lee's translation is there any suggestion that the model used by the Demiurge in creating the world is a *creature*, that is, something created. Still less is there any suggestion that the model is a *form* as opposed to a living being, such as Plato conceived the Demiurge itself to be.

My own preferred interpretation, of course, is not without difficulties of its own. If God or the Demiurge is the living being on whom the Demiurge modelled the universe, how was Plato able to describe all living creatures and intelligible beings as being *part* of it? Arthur Lovejoy has provided the basis for a satisfactory answer to this question in imputing to Plato what Lovejoy calls *the principle of plenitude*.⁴⁵ This asserts that 'the universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of *kinds* of living things [*sic*] is exhaustively exemplified'.⁴⁶ According to Lovejoy, Plato postulated this principle because, were the universe to have lacked any possible being, it would not be as complete as it might otherwise have been and hence would fall short in point of resemblance to the perfect counterpart on which it is modelled. For its part, the perfect counterpart would be perfect only through being complete and it could not be complete save by containing within itself the *notion* of all possible forms. The only sense, therefore, in which it is true of the perfect being on whom the world is modelled that it *contains* all living creatures is through its containing the *forms* of all such creatures within its consciousness.

Against Cornford's preferred view that what Plato intended as the Demiurge's model for the universe is the mysterious Form of the Living Creature, two considerations may be offered. First, on Cornford's view of what served the Divine Artificer as his model, however perfect it may be supposed to be, it must fall short in terms of perfection of the Divine Artificer himself. However, that the Demiurge's model should have been less perfect than the Demiurge Himself seems inconsistent with the following assertion about the model made by Plato. In Lee's translation, the relevant sentence runs, '[G]od's purpose was to use as his model *the highest and most completely perfect of intelligible things*, and so he created a single visible living being, containing within itself all living beings of the same natural

order.⁴⁷ According to Lee's translation of the sentence, it would seem that what Plato intended as the Demiurge's model for the universe must be understood as something other than what Cornford proposes it was. This is because any such form as that of the Living Being is manifestly less perfect than the Divine Artificer Himself.

Cornford's own translation of the sentence in question is somewhat different from Lee's. However, the same point applies nonetheless. Cornford's translation runs so: 'God, wishing to make this world most nearly like that intelligible thing which is best, fashioned it as a single visible living creature, containing within itself all living things whose nature is of the same order.'⁴⁸ Nothing that Cornford writes either about the Demiurge or about the Form of the Living Creature can make it at all plausible to suppose that the former is not intrinsically more perfect than the latter. Hence, even by Cornford's own translation, it is the Demiurge Himself rather than the Form of the Living Creature which Plato should be understood as having intended as the model to which the Demiurge referred in creating the universe.

In further support of my interpretation in preference to Cornford's, a second consideration may be offered. Much later on in the same text, after giving an account of the creation of the various individual life-forms, including man, Timaeus extols study of the physical universe and its constituents. He does so for the sake of the contribution which such study can make to personal happiness. Again, Cornford translates here a crucial sentence differently from Lee. In the latter's translation, the relevant sentence runs, 'The divine we should look for in all things for the sake of the measure of happiness in life that our nature permits, and the necessary for the sake of the divine, reflecting that without them we cannot perceive, apprehend, or in any way attain our objective.'⁴⁹ Cornford's translation of the same sentence runs, 'The divine we should search out in all things for the sake of a life of such happiness as our nature admits; the necessary for the sake of the divine, reflecting that apart from the necessary those other objects of our serious study cannot by themselves be perceived or communicated, nor can we in any other way have part or lot in them.'⁵⁰ If we hark back to the *Republic*, it will be recalled that, for Plato, man's highest happiness consists in having a vision of or contemplating the form of the good. Clearly, the sentence presently under consideration is alluding to this same form of happiness. Previously, I have argued that, when Plato spoke about the form of the good in the *Republic* what he had in mind was the form of something perfectly and supremely good, and that since, according to Plato, it is

only God who satisfies this description, it is God and no one or nothing else to whom we should understand Plato as having been intending to refer by this expression. Were the model to which the Demiurge referred in the creation of the world what Cornford claims it to have been, namely, the Form of the Living Creature, it would then be obscure, or, at best, only accidental to us, why our happiness should be said to reside in the knowledge of the form of the good whether that be equated with God or else construed more impersonally. However, if, as I have argued, we understand Plato as supposing the Divine Artificer to have used Himself as His model for the universe, it becomes much less arbitrary and much clearer *why* our happiness should be supposed to reside in knowledge of divine things. For, in contemplating these things, we come to imitate and hence to resemble God more closely and even Cornford cannot deny that, according to Plato, the Demiurge created all things from the desire that they should come as near as possible to being like Himself. In sum, Plato's text seems to provide more evidence in favour of my interpretation than it does Cornford's.

Accordingly, provided I am correct that we can and should understand the expression, 'the form of the good' as having been intended by Plato to be elliptical for 'the form of the most completely and perfectly good thing', and provided I am further correct in supposing Plato intended this expression to be an oblique way of referring to that particular which he believed uniquely instantiates this form, then we are justified in imputing to Plato the entire set of doctrines which compose what I am referring to as the classical conception of philosophy. In sum, if we suppose that I am correct in my proposal about how we should understand Plato's use of the term 'the form of the good', then we are entitled to impute to Plato each of the following three doctrines. The first is that God, otherwise called by Plato the Divine Artificer or Demiurge, is the explanation of the world and its broad form. The second is that wisdom consists in such knowledge. The third is that man's supreme happiness consists in the activity of contemplating this Being, in which form of activity man comes most closely to resemble God and thereby to fulfil the ultimate purpose for the sake of which God created the world. In short, if my account of what Plato meant by the form of the good is sound, we are safe in imputing the classical conception of philosophy to Plato in its entirety.

2.3 Aristotle's Unmoved Mover

Historians of philosophy are often wont to accentuate the difference in philosophical outlook between Plato and his erstwhile pupil, Aristotle, and, in many respects, this emphasis on the contrast between them is justified. So far as concerns their respective views of the nature, goal and value of philosophy, however, the two thinkers must be judged as one. Both were equally wedded to the classical conception of philosophy in its entirety. In the last section, I sought to substantiate this claim in regard to Plato. In the present section, I intend to do the same in connection with Aristotle. This task was begun in the previous chapter, when it was argued that, contrary to much received contemporary opinion, Aristotle equated the highest form of human happiness with the contemplation of God, this activity being that for the sake of which Aristotle supposes *sophia* is to be sought and valued. To complete my case for imputing the classical conception of philosophy to Aristotle, I shall now attempt to demonstrate his unequivocal commitment to the two other constituent doctrines that comprise this conception. The first, to recall, is that which equates *sophia* with possession of the correct explanation of why the world exists and has the broad form it does. The second is that which claims the correct explanation of the world and its form to be that it was created so by God in order that human beings, together with any other rational creatures whom God has also created, might discover the existence of God and thereby join God in the activity of contemplating Him in which activity God is perpetually and blissfully engaged.

As with Plato, so with Aristotle, the imputation of these doctrines to Aristotle is by no means uncontroversial. Many commentators on and expositors of Aristotle deny he supposed the world to have been created at all, let alone by a Being with sufficient resemblance to the Judaeo-Christian God as to warrant the same appellation. It has become quite commonplace for expositors of Aristotle to offer almost purely naturalistic accounts of his thought which give little or no indication of the centrality which theism has within it. Francis Cornford set the tone early in the twentieth century in a short summary account he gave of Greek philosophy. Here, Aristotle is described as 'a man of this world, with no longing to escape from it into another, ... always trying to get back to this world, to escape from the otherworldliness of Platonism, and to regain contact with the philosophy of common sense'.⁵¹ Not even Cornford, however, can altogether

disguise from his readers the fact that, in the shape of his postulated Unmoved Mover, Aristotle posits a Being who bears some considerable degree of likeness to the Judaeo-Christian God. Cornford does his best to play down the philosophical significance of this posited Being. He writes, '[Aristotle's] argument demonstrating the existence of such a being is unconvincing to a modern scientific mind, and strikes a chill to the religious consciousness'.⁵² In support of this judgment, Cornford makes the following autobiographical disclosure:

[I]t has also seemed to me unfortunate that the word 'God' (which is, after all, a religious word) should have been retained by philosophers as the name or a factor in their system that no one could possibly regard as an object of worship, far less of love. . . . The plain truth is that the Being described [by Aristotle] as the object of the world's desire, the goal of aspiration, has ceased to be an object that could excite anything recognisable as desire. . . . Aristotle's God does not plan the order of the world, or work for any good end. . . . The Aristotelian system, when it passes beyond the biological field to include the whole range of physics and metaphysics, . . . is a cenotaph, not a permanent refuge for the spirit.⁵³

A similar verdict on Aristotle's God was delivered by Etienne Gilson. He observed that

[p]erhaps, we ought to love the god of Aristotle, but what would be the use, since this god does not love us? . . . From time to time a few wise men succeed in sharing for a fleeting moment in the eternal beatitude of the divine contemplation. . . . But . . . [t]ruly wise men do not play at being gods; they rather aim to achieve the practical wisdom of moral and political life. . . . With Aristotle, the Greeks had gained an indisputably rational theology, but they had lost their religion.⁵⁴

More recent expositors of Aristotle to have echoed similar sentiments to those expressed by Cornford and Gilson include Jonathan Barnes who has claimed that 'Aristotle's gods are too abstract, remote and impersonal to be regarded as the objects of a religious man's worship',⁵⁵ and Karen Armstrong who has observed that 'a deity which is utterly remote from humanity, such as Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, cannot inspire a spiritual quest'.⁵⁶

As with the parallel exercise undertaken in connection with Plato, I

now intend to show that Aristotle may and should be regarded as having subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy in its entirety. In the course of doing so, I intend to challenge and, hopefully, to reverse these deprecatory assessments of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. I will mount my defence primarily by means of citing passages from Aristotle's writings. These either explicitly or implicitly assert the various constituent doctrines which make up the classical conception. I shall begin this task by seeking first to justify my imputation to Aristotle of the equation of *sophia* with a knowledge of the explanation of the world.

In the opening chapters of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes it uncontroversibly clear that, for him, the goal of philosophy is the acquisition of *sophia* or theoretical wisdom, understood as possession of a correct explanation of why the world exists with the broad form it does. Aristotle commences this work with the immortal sentence, 'All men by nature desire to know.'⁵⁷ Immediately after, Aristotle goes on to point out that, since part of what human beings are naturally curious about is the causes of what they encounter, it follows that, to satisfy their natural curiosity, human beings must go beyond the deliverance of their senses and employ their powers of reasoning. For reasoning always needs to be employed in the discovery of causes. Aristotle points out that some rudimentary causal knowledge is embodied in all the practical skills and arts, such as medicine and building. This is because such arts always involve knowing what precise forms of action are needed to accomplish certain precise ends, and such knowledge is causal in character.

Aristotle observes that, at first, the only causal knowledge of interest to man concerned what he must do to satisfy his most pressing biological needs. Such causal knowledge became incorporated in the skills and arts devoted to the procurement of the basic necessities of life. They include such arts as hunting, fire-making, agriculture, husbandry, sewing and so on. Once such arts had been developed, human beings became interested in developing techniques by means of which they could satisfy their recreational needs. Although Aristotle does not explicitly say so here, the fine arts, such as music, drama and painting, incorporate causal knowledge of this kind. Only after all the practical arts had been developed and refined did human beings start to engage in any form of causal enquiry unmotivated by any practical concern, and motivated purely from curiosity or wonder. Initially, such purely theoretical activity was undertaken only by those individuals whose societies had provided them with sufficient

leisure for the purpose, for example, as Aristotle observes, the priestly caste in Egypt. It was out of such purely theoretical wonderment that emerged the various mathematical and other purely theoretical arts, including philosophy.

The *sophia* or wisdom after which philosophy aspires, Aristotle informs us, comprises knowledge of what he calls 'the first causes and principles of things'.⁵⁸ He remarks, 'clearly then wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes'.⁵⁹ Aristotle mentions several characteristics which belong to such knowledge and which distinguish it from other species of causal knowledge. First, such knowledge as wisdom consists in has the broadest possible degree of scope, and, hence, involves no detailed knowledge about any specific particulars. It supplies for things only a very general causal explanation. Second, such knowledge goes well beyond any embodied in common sense, wisdom necessarily having far greater scope and being more difficult to acquire than any which is readily available to practically everyone without need of any special effort. Third, such knowledge admits of precise formulation which renders it capable of being conveyed to others by those fully conversant with it. Finally, such knowledge is worth having for its own sake, and has other than practical value.

Part of the subject-matter of wisdom is, we are told, 'the good, i.e. the end [of things]'.⁶⁰ This is because, so Aristotle tells us, the purpose of things 'is one of the [types] of causes' for which knowledge is sought. The goal or product of the activity of philosophy, then, is knowledge or science of first causes where this is understood to include knowledge of the purpose of things.

Aristotle explains how this science of first principles and causes gradually came to arise and to acquire the final form in which he is about to expound it in the *Metaphysics*.

It is owing to their wonder that men both now and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little ... to greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. ... [T]herefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. ... Evidently then we do not seek it for the sake of any other advantage ..., for it alone exists for its own sake.⁶¹

Aristotle, then, proceeds to offer the following, highly significant

description of the science or body of knowledge with which he equates wisdom. He calls it 'the most divine science'.⁶² Part of his reason in doing so, he tells us, is that 'God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle'. That Aristotle shares this opinion comes out later on in the *Metaphysics*. It is not until Book VI of the *Metaphysics* that Aristotle advances an argument designed to establish the existence of such a divine being.

This book begins with Aristotle reminding his readers that they and he 'are seeking the principles and the causes of the things that are, and obviously of them *qua* being'.⁶³ He writes,

[I]f there is something which is eternal and immovable and separable [from physical things], clearly the knowledge of it belongs to a theoretical science – not, however, to physics (for physics deals with ... movable things) nor to mathematics [for mathematics deals with numbers which, despite being eternal and immovable, are not separable from physical things], but to a science prior to both. ... [This] first science deals with things which both exist separately and are immovable [if there are any such things].⁶⁴

Aristotle observes that, if there is anything which is eternal, immovable and separate from physical things, '[t]here must ... be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology, since it is obvious that if the divine is present anywhere, it is present in things of this sort. And the highest science must deal with the highest genus'.⁶⁵ Aristotle's claim is that, provided the world possesses some transcendent cause of whose existence human beings are capable of acquiring knowledge, then theology will be the science or body of knowledge in which *sophia* consists. At this point, Aristotle has yet to affirm that any such divine Being does exist. He observes, however, that, should any such Being exist, its existence and nature will form the subject-matter of the highest science. He writes,

[I]f there is no substance other than those which are formed by nature, natural science will be the first science; but if there is an immovable substance, the science of this must be prior and must be first philosophy, and universal in this way, because it is first. And it will belong to this [science] to consider being *qua* being – both what it is and the attributes which belong to it *qua* being.⁶⁶

In Book XI, Aristotle returns to the question whether, beyond the

substances investigated by the physical sciences, any exist of which only a science other than physics could provide us with knowledge, were any to exist. In connection with the entities that constitute the subject-matter of physics, Aristotle points out that, while they are all capable of existing apart from other things and hence are genuine substances, all of them are subject, or, at least, are susceptible, to *change*. Those entities which form the subject-matter of mathematics, such as numbers and geometric figures, are not susceptible to change. However, none are genuine substances, since none is capable of existing independently of the physical substances which instantiate them. First, philosophy can be a science wholly different from physics and mathematics, therefore, if and only if there exists at least one genuine substance which is not susceptible to any form of change. Aristotle affirms his commitment to the existence of such a substance when he remarks that 'about that which can exist apart and is unmovable there is a science different from both of these [physics and mathematics], if there is a substance of this nature (I mean separable and unmovable), *as we shall try to prove there is* [my emphasis]'.⁶⁷ Immediately after, he adds

*[a]nd if there is such a kind of thing in the world, here must surely be the divine, and this must be the first and most dominant principle. Evidently, then, [were there such a substance] there are three kinds of theoretical sciences – physics, mathematics, theology ... and of these ... the last named is best; for it deals with the highest of existing things, and each science is called better or worse in virtue of its proper object [my emphasis].*⁶⁸

By claiming that the divine substance is first and by claiming that the science that deals with it to be the highest, Aristotle gives unmistakable indication that he regards God as being the explanation of the world and its form. We shall now reconstruct the reasoning which Aristotle offers on behalf of the existence of such a Being. Doing so will establish our claim that Aristotle regarded God as the explanation of the world and of its form.

In Book XII of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle advances an argument for the existence of the divine Being who he maintains to be the ultimate explanation of things. Aristotle begins this argument by distinguishing three different kinds of possible substance. The first are indestructible physical substances such as Aristotle regarded the planets as being. The second are impermanent physical substances, for

example, individual plants and animals. The third are indestructible non-physical substances, such as God would be were God to exist. Aristotle's aim is to prove the existence of this third possible type of substance.

As was his customary practice, Aristotle begins by setting out all the various rival philosophical views on which entities are instances of the third type of possible substance. Some philosophers, he remarks, acknowledge as instances of this kind only such entities as are capable of enjoying independent existence of their own, such as God and the other lesser divinities. Later, Aristotle reveals this to be his view. Other philosophers include within this class only forms and numbers; still others only numbers.⁶⁹ Aristotle begins the demonstration of his own preferred view by first disposing of the view that numbers and forms belong to the class of indestructible non-physical substances. Such things might well be immutable, concedes Aristotle, but none is a genuine substance, since none is capable of independent existence apart from various other substances in which they are instantiated.⁷⁰

Having eliminated forms and numbers as possible candidates for inclusion within the class of immutable non-physical substances, Aristotle proceeds to advance his central argument on behalf of the existence of a permanent non-physical substance. He argues that it is necessary to postulate the existence of such a Being in order to account for the various changes that occur in the physical world. Aristotle offers two different versions of his central argument for God. The first occurs in Book VII of his *Physics*; the second in Book XII of the *Metaphysics*. Both versions of the argument may be schematically represented as follows. I shall call this Aristotle's *central argument*.

- Premise 1: Every change that any physical substance undergoes results ultimately from the causal influence upon it of some substance other than itself.
- Premise 2: It is not possible that every change that is undergone by every physical substance results from the causal influence upon it of some other physical substance(s).
- Ergo*, 3: If any physical substance undergoes any change, there exists(s) some non-physical substance(s) that is (or are) causally responsible for some changes in physical substances.
- Premise 4: Some physical substances undergo change.

Ergo, 5: Some non-physical substance(s) exist(s) that is (or are) causally responsible for some change(s) that some physical substance(s) undergo.

On behalf of the individual premises of his central argument for God, Aristotle offers several considerations in the *Physics* and in the *Metaphysics*. I shall now rehearse these various considerations, beginning with those offered in the *Physics*.

At the beginning of Book VII of the *Physics*, Aristotle advances the following argument for the first premise of his central argument for God.⁷¹ Whatsoever cannot undergo any form of change unless something else undergoes some concomitant change cannot itself be the (whole) cause of any change it undergoes. Every physical substance is composed of physical parts such that no physical substance can undergo any form of change unless at least some of its physical parts undergo concomitant change of some kind. Therefore, no physical substance can ever itself be the (whole) cause of any change it undergoes. Every change that any physical substance undergoes is either caused by itself or is caused by some substance other than itself. Therefore, every change that any physical substance undergoes results ultimately from the causal influence upon it of some substance other than itself (= premise 1).

On behalf of the second premise of his central argument for God, Aristotle offers two separate sub-arguments in the *Physics*. The first occurs at the beginning of Book VII, the second in Book VIII. I shall now rehearse each argument in turn.

The argument which Aristotle offers in Book VII of the *Physics* for the second premise of his central argument appeals to a thesis for which Aristotle had previously argued in Book III of that work. This thesis is to the effect that no set of physical substances is capable of being infinitely large in number. Aristotle invokes this thesis on behalf of premise 2 as follows. Assume the existence of a set of physical substances which are such that each member of the set both causes changes in, and is also itself changed by, some other member(s) of that set. Unless outside the set there were to exist some unchanging substance which produced changes in some member(s) of the set which in turn initiated changes in other members of the set, the number of physical substances within the set would have to be infinitely large. This is so for the following reason. Suppose the number of substances in the set was finite. And suppose further that all changes in members of the set were initiated by other members of the

set. It would then follow that the set would have to contain at least one member that effected change(s) in other members without itself being changed by any other member, which is contrary to hypothesis. However, no set of physical substances can be infinitely large in number. Therefore, it is not possible that every change undergone by every physical substance results from the causal influence of other physical substance(s) (Premise 2).

The argument which Aristotle advances in Book VIII of the *Physics* for premise 2 of his central argument relies on four separate premises. The first is simply premise 1 of his central argument for the Unmoved Mover. The second premise is that time is everlasting, a metaphysical principle for which Aristotle had advanced a separate argument in Chapter 1 of Book VIII.⁷² The third premise is that space is finite, for which thesis Aristotle had argued in Chapter 9 of that same book.⁷³ Finally, the argument makes tacit appeal to a central tenet of Aristotle's geocentric cosmology. This is to the effect that the rotation of the outermost heavenly sphere in which the fixed stars are embedded exerts a causal influence upon all other heavenly spheres, including that which contains the sun, and thereby indirectly is part cause of all physical changes undergone by all physical substances within the sublunar region, all such substances being causally influenced by the sun.

These various propositions are deployed by Aristotle as premises of the following argument for premise 2 of his central argument for God. Since time is everlasting, it cannot fail to exist. Since time cannot exist in the absence of locomotion or relative change of place, it follows that some locomotion, or relative change of place, must always be occurring at all times. Because space is finite, all locomotion or relative change of place would eventually cease, unless something were forever undergoing continuous circular motion. Since every physical thing that undergoes any change does so as a result of something other than itself (premise 1 of the central argument), and since physical substances are capable of imparting locomotion to other physical substances only through undergoing locomotion themselves, it follows that whatever imparts everlasting and continuous circular motion to whatever undergoes it cannot itself be a physical substance. Given that space is finite, the largest entity that undergoes everlasting continuous circular motion, namely, the outermost heavenly sphere, is itself finite in size. Since the rotation of this sphere has a causal influence upon the location of the sun, and since changes in the location of the sun relative to the earth exert a causal influence upon all

the physical substances contained within the compass of the innermost sphere, it follows that it is not possible that every change that is undergone by every physical substance results from the causal influence of other physical substances (= premise 2).

The considerations which Aristotle advances in Book XII of the *Metaphysics* on behalf of the existence of God are more heavily dependent still on his geocentric cosmology. Here, Aristotle argues as follows:

There is ... something which is always moved with an unceasing motion, which is motion in a circle; and this is plain not in theory only but in fact. Therefore the first heaven [i.e. the outermost sphere of the universe in which the fixed stars are set] must be eternal. There is therefore also something which moves it ... without being moved, being eternal, substance, and actuality.⁷⁴

Why does Aristotle maintain here that what moves the outermost sphere is something that is itself *unmoved*? Why did he not instead regard that which he supposed moves the outermost sphere, and through doing so is the first of all physical substances, to be a *self-mover*, as well as being a *first mover* of all that is moved? The answer is that the prime mover must be either physical or not physical. Aristotle argues that the first mover is not physical on the grounds that physical things are only able to move other physical things through themselves moving in some way. Since he has previously argued that every physical substance that undergoes movement is changed by something other than itself, it follows that the *first mover* must be non-physical. If this were not so, something else would be moving it and it would not be first. However, so Aristotle argues, if the first mover is a non-physical substance, it cannot move itself. This is because 'all the other changes are posterior to [in the sense of impossible without] change of place'⁷⁵ and only physical substances can have a place or spatial location. The first mover of physical substances must be unmoved, therefore, because it is not physical.

We are now faced with another question. *How* can an Unmoved Mover bring about motion in what it moves? In addressing this question in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes mention of a factor of which he makes no mention in the argument for the Unmoved Mover he advances in the *Physics*. It is Aristotle's introduction of this explanatory factor that more than anything else has served to persuade many of his expositors that the Unmoved Mover whom Aristotle postulates

can be thought to bear only the slightest resemblance to the God of Judaeo-Christianity, and hence is unworthy of receiving either the same appellation or reverence. Aristotle has inferred the existence of an Unmoved Mover from the necessity of postulating the existence of something capable of accounting for the everlasting circular motion of the outermost heavenly sphere. Having inferred the existence of such a being, he immediately goes on to mention one way in which some things are capable of producing movement in others without themselves moving. He writes, 'the object of desire and the object of thought move in this way; they move without being moved'.⁷⁶ Shortly after making this observation, Aristotle leaves it beyond doubt that, in his view, the Unmoved Mover moves other things through being a final cause. He writes,

That a final cause may exist among unchangeable entities is shown by the distinction of its meanings. For the final cause is (a) some being for whose good an action is done, and (b) something at which the action aims; and of these the latter exists among unchangeable entities though the former does not. The final cause, then, produces motion as being loved, but all other things move by being moved.⁷⁷

On the basis of this passage, many philosophers and theologians have been led to deny that Aristotle's Unmoved Mover can or should be equated with the Judaeo-Christian God. They are led to this denial because they interpret Aristotle to be here asserting that an unchangeable entity can serve as a final cause only for some *other* being(s) besides itself. According to their interpretation, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover moves what it does move only through coming to be desired or thought of as good by whatever is moved as a result of having such desires or thoughts. Expositors of Aristotle who favour this interpretation of him differ as to precisely who or what is to be thought of as being moved in consequence of having desires for or thoughts of the Unmoved Mover. Some maintain Aristotle's view to be that everything that undergoes any movement is moved by some kind of desire for the Unmoved Mover. Others, somewhat more judiciously, restrict membership of the class of things moved by the Unmoved Mover to substances *capable* of entertaining thoughts of the Unmoved Mover. This confines the class of things moved by the Unmoved Mover to such beings as possess intellect or rational minds. On this view, the only substances who are moved by the Unmoved Mover's being a final

cause for them are human beings, plus those lesser divinities who, according to Aristotle, animate the heavenly spheres. Aristotle supposes these lesser divinities to be endlessly engaged in thinking of the Unmoved Mover and their thoughts are supposed to bring about the endless circular motions of whichever sphere they individually animate. Their thoughts of the Unmoved Mover are said to bring about the endless circular motion of the spheres because, being eternal, endless circular motion approximates as closely to the Unmoved Mover as these beings are capable of becoming. On each of these two interpretations of Aristotle, his view is said to be that, in being a final cause, the Unmoved Mover moves nothing itself, save through being an object of the thought or desire *for* other beings.

Widespread though these readings of Aristotle are, it is my contention that they are profoundly mistaken. The passage quoted above which is their basis admits of an entirely different reading which permits us to suppose that, for Aristotle, the Unmoved Mover is an *efficient* cause as well as a final cause. I shall now argue that alternative reading is to be preferred because it is more consistent than are its rival readings with numerous other passages in Aristotle's writings which either assert or imply God to be the efficient, as well as final, cause of things.⁷⁸

The passage from Aristotle quoted above in which the Unmoved Mover is asserted to move other things through being a final cause neither need nor should be interpreted as either asserting or implying that the things moved by the Unmoved Mover are moved as a result of their desiring or otherwise thinking of *Him*. Rather, it can and should be read in the following, altogether different manner. The first sentence should be read as drawing attention to an ambiguity in the term 'final cause'. This ambiguity makes it possible for an entity to be conceived of as being both unchanged and unchangeable while also affected by, in the sense of being subject to, final causality. The second sentence explicates the way in which it is possible for an unchanging thing to be subject to final causality. Unchangeable entities can be subject to final causation without their immutability being compromised through their having conscious ends or purposes which they accomplish through causing movements in *other* things by willing these movements *themselves*. The second sentence also explicates that sense in which unchangeable entities are not to be thought of as being subject to final causation. They are not to be thought of as subject to final causation in the sense of being entities for whose sake actions are done. The third and final sentence contrasts the different ways in

which those things which move other things can effect movement in other things. Unchangeable entities can do so through being subject to final causation in the sense of having conscious ends or purposes which they achieve through effecting changes in these other things by willing them. Everything else that moves other things does so only as a result of being moved by something other than itself.

This alternative reading of the passage in question, which derives from Franz Brentano, shows how unmoved movers can be *efficient* causes of the changes or motions in other things. Of the various alternative ways of reading the passage, Brentano's reading of Aristotle is to be preferred to alternatives because it coheres best with various other passages in Aristotle's writings in which a divine being is either asserted or implied to be an efficient cause both of the existence of that which undergoes change, as well as an efficient cause of certain changes undergone by these mutable things. Admittedly, there are other passages in Aristotle's writings which some expositors have claimed cohere better with rival interpretations to the one favoured here. However, as I will now endeavour to show, these other passages can seem to count against the one preferred here only as a result of their being misconstrued. I shall now review the textual evidence for and against the interpretation of Aristotle being defended here, seeking to show why it is to be preferred to its alternatives.

In support of the interpretation of Aristotle favoured here, it is possible to cite numerous passages from Aristotle's writings which seem clearly to assert or imply that the Unmoved Mover is an efficient cause, and not just a final cause. Here follows a representative sample. '[H]owever true it may be that the heavens are due to spontaneity, it will still be true that *intelligence [nous]* and nature will be *prior causes of this All and of many things in it besides*'⁷⁹ (my emphasis). 'God and nature *create* nothing that has not its use.'⁸⁰ 'God ... fulfilled the perfection of the universe by *making* coming-to-be uninterrupted: for the greatest possible coherence would thus be secured to existence, because that "coming-to-be should itself come-to-be perpetually" is the closest approximation to eternal being.'⁸¹ 'Those who suppose ... that supreme beauty and goodness are not present in the beginning, because the beginnings both of plants and of animals are *causes*, but beauty and completeness are in the *effects* of these, are wrong in their opinion. For the seed comes from other individuals which are prior and complete.'⁸²

[I]f there is something which is capable of moving things ... but is

not actually doing so, there will not necessarily be movement.... Nothing, then, is gained even if we suppose eternal substances, as the believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause change; nay, even this is not enough, nor is another substance besides the Forms enough; for if it is not to *act*, there will be no movement.⁸³

As remarked, Aristotle's writings also contain several other passages which have been construed as providing evidence against supposing that Aristotle regarded the Unmoved Mover is or could be an efficient cause of anything. In the case of such passages, I shall now explain why they should not be construed as offering support for this view. The first such set of problematic passages are those in which Aristotle claims, of the lesser divinities whom he supposed move the heavenly spheres, that they have existed from eternity. Some commentators have construed such passages as establishing that Aristotle did not consider his postulated Unmoved Mover to be the efficient cause of the existence of these substances. This is argued on the grounds that, since these spheres and the divinities that move them are said to be *eternal*, there could never have been a time at which they did not exist, and, hence, they could not have been brought into being.

This argument rests on the assumption that it was Aristotle's view that nothing that is eternal needs to have been created in order to exist. Against this assumption, however, it may be observed that, if Aristotle supposed that the eternity of the existence of the heavenly spheres *were* incompatible with God's having created them, then Aristotle should equally have been obliged to consider their circular movement as having been uncaused. For he considers this movement of theirs to have always been going on. Aristotle, however, clearly regarded the eternity of the circular motion of the heavenly spheres as being compatible with such motion having been caused. Therefore, there is no reason to think that Aristotle did not equally suppose the eternity of the spheres and of the beings that move them to be equally compatible with God having caused them to exist.

The second problematic set of passages in Aristotle for the interpretation of him favoured here are those where he claims that the life of God is wholly given over to the activity of contemplation and is not at all creative or productive. In the final book of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, for example, Aristotle discusses, among other things, in which form of activity God and the other lesser divinities can be thought to engage in which their happiness can be supposed to consist. Aristotle

considers, only to dismiss, the suggestion that such beings might be thought of as engaging in some form of morally virtuous conduct. He infers that contemplation is the only activity in which we can suppose them to be engaged in which their happiness can be supposed to consist. Such passages have been read as indicating that Aristotle did not suppose his God to be the efficient cause of anything. I shall consider the most well known of these passages to illustrate how they admit of a reading which renders them consistent with supposing that Aristotle considered God to be an efficient cause. The most relevant passage runs as follows:

We assume the gods to be above all other beings blessed and happy; but what sort of actions must we assign to them? Acts of justice? Will not the gods seem absurd if they make contracts and return deposits, and so on? Acts of a brave man, then, confronting dangers and running risks because it is noble to do so? Or liberal acts? To whom will they give? It will be strange if they are really to have money or anything of the kind. And what would their temperate acts be? Is not such praise tasteless, since they have no bad appetites? If we were to run through them all, the circumstances of [morally virtuous] action would be found trivial and unworthy of gods. Still, every one supposes that they *live* and therefore that they are active; we cannot suppose them to sleep.... Now if you take away from a living being [physical] action, and still more production, what is left but contemplation? Therefore the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative....⁸⁴

Some expositors of Aristotle have read him to be here denying that God and the other divinities engage in any other activity besides contemplation. Such a reading seems to exclude world-creation as one of God's possible activities. More closely considered, however, the relevant passage in Aristotle admits of a different reading. For our purposes, the crucial sentences in it are the last pair. It is they which have been cited as grounds for supposing Aristotle to have thought that the only activity in which God engaged is contemplation. Contrary to much received opinion, however, these two sentences neither need nor should be interpreted so. The penultimate sentence can simply be read as making an observation about the possible activities of living *creatures*. It can be read as asserting of them that, if from a list of their possible activities, one subtracts all practical ones, then

the only activity which will be left is contemplation. The final sentence can be read as asserting that, it follows from the foregoing fact, the activity of God which surpasses all others in blessedness must be contemplation.

It should be noticed that the last sentence in the passage under discussion neither asserts nor implies that contemplation is the *only* activity in which God engages. On the contrary, by describing contemplation as surpassing all other activities in blessedness, the final sentence in the passage suggests that Aristotle must have supposed that there are other activities besides contemplation in which God engages.

It might be asked why, if Aristotle considered there to be other such activities besides contemplation in which God and the other divinities engaged, such as, in the case of God, world-creation, Aristotle chose not to mention any of them here, when considering the sorts of activity in which beings such as God engage. There is, however, a good reason why he might have so chosen. Brentano has argued that the reason Aristotle makes no mention of any other activity besides contemplation in which he believed the gods engaged is that, as the context makes clear, all that Aristotle is here concerned to identify are which activities of theirs are those in which their blessedness or happiness can be deemed to consist. Should there have been any other activities of theirs which are not what their happiness consists in, Aristotle would have had no reason to mention them here. The claim is, then, that, in the passage under discussion, Aristotle's sole purpose is to identify only those activities of the gods in which their happiness might be thought to consist. He is not concerned here to give an exhaustive list of all their activities.

In support of this reading of the passage in question, it is possible to cite the following pair of considerations. First, although he does not mention any of them here, it is beyond question that Aristotle *did* suppose that the gods engage in some other activities besides contemplation. For example, we know that Aristotle claims that the lesser divinities which animate the heavenly spheres are causally responsible for the eternal circular motion of these spheres. Secondly, the interpretation of Aristotle for which I am arguing here explains something which otherwise remains unclear. This is why, in seeking to identify the activities of the gods in which their happiness consists, Aristotle should have supposed it relevant to consider which human activities remain after production and all other physical activities have been excluded. This matter is relevant to the task of identifying

the form of activity in which the happiness of the gods consists for the following reason. Unlike human beings who are embodied and whose lack of self-sufficiency stems from their physical embodiment, the gods are self-sufficient because they are immaterial. The heavenly spheres are immaterial in not being composed of any *earthly* matter. Consequently, the form of activity in which the gods must be supposed to be able to find their happiness must be one in which we too are able to find happiness, after all our physical needs have been catered for, including our need for physical exercise and recreation. The only activity left over in these circumstances is contemplation. Hence, so Aristotle infers, it must be in the activity of contemplation that the gods find their happiness. That this was Aristotle's view neither implies nor suggests that Aristotle supposed that contemplation is the only activity of which the gods are capable, any more than this is so in the case of human beings.

The gods, however, engage in other activities besides contemplation for different reasons than human beings engage in other activities besides contemplation. Human beings do so because their embodiment prevents them from being self-sufficient. They are compelled to engage in other activities besides contemplation in order to remain alive and flourish as the embodied beings they are. In the case of the gods, Brentano suggests it was Aristotle's view, although Aristotle nowhere states this explicitly, that the reason they engage in other activities besides contemplation stems from the goodness of what it is that they contemplate. This is God himself.

God's contemplation of Himself results in His creating a cosmos which includes the lesser divinities, as well as the physical universe and the rational souls who inhabit it. God creates the physical world so as to bring into being the closest possible approximation to Himself. He does so, because, in being the object of His own activity of contemplation, God recognises Himself to be supremely good. Being good as well as being omnipotent, God is both able and willing through an effortless act of will to bring into existence the greater good in comparison with the existence of Himself alone that is constituted by His existence *plus* the closest possible approximation to Himself. God creates the latter through creating a physical universe which enables an unending and therefore potentially infinite series of rational beings to come into being, each of whom is capable of achieving the closest possible approximation to God in the act of lovingly contemplating God.

The lesser divinities produce the eternal circular motion of the

heavenly spheres, because, as a result of their act of contemplating God, they come to know His world-plan and thereby become aware of the role assigned to them within it. In *their* case, they move the spheres through God being a final cause for them. This is so, although God is also the efficient cause of their existence. God could have moved the spheres Himself directly. Instead He willed the greater good that is achieved by His creating a cosmos which is rendered into an organic whole by all its constituent parts, including the lesser divinities, being interrelated with one another.

A third passage which some have supposed difficult to square with the notion that Aristotle supposed the Unmoved Mover to be an efficient cause of things is that in which he mentions with approval the principle that nothing can come from nothing. The relevant assertion occurs in Book I of the *Physics* where Aristotle is expounding the views of Anaxagoras. It runs,

[S]ince everything that comes into being must arise either from what is or from what is not, and *it is impossible for it* [i.e. anything that comes into being] *to arise from what is not* (on this point all the physicists agree), they thought that the truth of the alternative necessarily followed, namely that things come into being out of existent things, i.e. out of things already present, but imperceptible to our senses [my emphasis].⁸⁵

Some have taken this passage to imply that Aristotle could not have regarded God to have created anything *ex nihilo*. Despite his clearly endorsing the principle that it is impossible for anything that comes into being to do so from nothing, Aristotle should not here be taken to be denying the possibility of divine creation *ex nihilo*. From the context in which the assertion occurs, it is clear, as Brentano has pointed out, that Aristotle is only considering what is true of the things that come-to-be at the level at which physicists or biochemists consider these things. At that level, it is perfectly true that nothing can come into being from nothing. However, that the principle holds true at this level is perfectly consistent with the entire scheme of nature having been created *ex nihilo*. Indeed, later on in the *Physics*, Aristotle appears to assert that the whole scheme of nature has been created *ex nihilo*. He remarks, '[i]t is clear, then, that ... there is something that ... as something apart from each one of them, ... is the cause of the fact that some things are and others are not, and of the continuous process of change'.⁸⁶

Finally, there are several passages in which Aristotle asserts God to

be the object of God's activity of contemplation. Such passages have been read as showing Aristotle's view to have been that God never gives thought to anything besides Himself and hence could never have created the world. For to have created the world would have required God to give it some thought. There is a way to reconcile such passages with supposing Aristotle to have regarded God as being the efficient cause of the existence of the world. This effected reconciliation was first proposed by Aquinas⁸⁷ and was later defended by Franz Brentano. To effect the reconciliation, all that need be supposed is that Aristotle thought that God has the world in mind indirectly as His creation, when directly thinking of Himself.

In opposition to this proposed reconciliation, David Ross has cited a sentence from Book XII of the *Metaphysics* which Ross has interpreted as ruling out the possibility that Aristotle could have supposed that God thinks of the world in thinking of Himself. The sentence in question occurs just after Aristotle has explicitly raised the question of what it is that the divine being could be engaged in thinking. The sentence is intended to help answer this question. The sentence runs, 'Either of itself or of something else.'⁸⁸ Ross claims that this sentence shows, for Aristotle, 'that God should know Himself and that He should know other things are alternatives'.⁸⁹

This sentence cannot bear the weight which Ross places upon it. This is so for several reasons. First, elsewhere Aristotle makes it plain that he does think God can think of other things besides himself. For example, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states explicitly that God loves and shows special favour towards those who love him. For example, Aristotle states,

he who exercises his reason and cultivates it seems to be both in the best state of mind and *most dear to the gods*. For if the gods have any care for human affairs, *as they are thought to have*, it would be reasonable both that they should delight in that which was best and most akin to them ... and that they should reward those who love and honour this most ... [T]hese attributes belong most of all to the philosopher. ... He, therefore, is the *dearest to the gods* [my emphasis].⁹⁰

Passages such as this one can be rendered consistent with the one cited by Ross only by supposing that Aristotle did not wish to exclude the possibility that, in thinking of Himself, God is able also to think of his creatures.

Second, if, as has been argued here, it was Aristotle's view that God is the efficient cause of the existence of the world, then God's thought of Himself will *ipso facto* include the thought of the world as His creation. This will be so in the way that the thought of the world entertained by an atheist, or someone who has not even formed the idea of God, would not include any thought of God. Consequently, notwithstanding the sentence of Aristotle's which Ross cites in support of the contrary view, it is possible to reconcile Aristotle's claim that God thinks of nothing but Himself with supposing Aristotle to have thought of God as the efficient cause of the world.

2.4 The Unmoved Mover and the Judaeo-Christian God

To complete my case for supposing that Aristotle considered God to be the explanation of the world and its form, I shall now enumerate the various attributes which explicitly or implicitly Aristotle ascribes to the Being whom he calls God. As we see, they bear a striking resemblance to those which have traditionally been ascribed to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This coincidence between the two sets of attributes provides further corroboration for my claim that, but for Aristotle's not having countenanced any special form of divine revelation and his having recognised lesser divinities, his conception of God differs little from the God posited by Judaism and Christianity. Some of the attributes which Aristotle ascribes to God have already been mentioned. For the purpose of highlighting the resemblance between his God and that of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it is worth mentioning these attributes once again.

To the Being whom he calls God, Aristotle ascribes the following set of characteristics, all of which are ascribed to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. First, Aristotle's God is an *Unmoved Mover* of other things. By this, Aristotle means that this Being is not subject or susceptible to any form of change. In other words, Aristotle conceived his God to be *immutable*. That he does so would have been enough to enable us to infer that Aristotle's God is, secondly, *immaterial*. For everything physical is susceptible to change, if only of location. Aristotle, however, obligingly provides us with an explicit affirmation of God's immateriality.⁹¹ More than that, he offers a different argument for ascribing this attribute to God. The argument runs as follows. Since God produces endless motion in physical things, God must be infinitely powerful. Since nothing of finite physical magnitude possesses infinite power, and since nothing physical can be infinite in

magnitude, it follows that God is not anything physical. Hence, God is immaterial.

One of the premises which Aristotle employs in his argument for God's immateriality is his assertion that God is infinitely powerful. As this assertion figures in this argument, Aristotle ascribes this attribute to God on the grounds that it is only if God is such that God can bring about the endless changes in the physical world for which He must be deemed responsible. Strictly speaking, in order for God to be thought capable of producing an endless series of changes, it is not necessary that God be thought of as *infinitely* powerful. All that God need be thought of as possessing from eternity is some immense finite power. Such a degree of power falls short of being infinite in the sense of rendering its possessor all-powerful or omnipotent. To be such, God has to be capable of bringing about anything that it is logically possible. Elsewhere, however, Aristotle does not demur from explicitly ascribing such a degree of power to God. In the *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle quotes with approval two lines from Agathon in which this degree of power is ascribed to God. The lines run, 'For this alone is lacking even to God, to make undone things that have once been done.'⁹² Accordingly, we may regard Aristotle as having ascribed to God, a third attribute traditionally ascribed to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is *omnipotence*.

In having supposed that God knows the world through knowing Himself, Aristotle may also be supposed to have ascribed to God a fourth attribute traditionally thought of as belonging to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is *omniscience*.

A fifth, very important attribute which Aristotle ascribes to his God is that of *unity* or oneness, in the sense of indivisibility. In *Metaphysics* Book XII, Ch. 9, for example, Aristotle enquires 'whether the object of the divine thought is composite'. He recognises that, were God composite, God could not be immutable. For, in that case, God would undergo change in thinking about different parts of Himself. Aristotle writes 'if it [the object of divine thought] were [composite], [its] thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole'. However, Aristotle goes on to invoke God's immateriality to establish His simplicity or unity. He writes, 'We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible – as human thought, or rather the thought of composite beings, is in a certain period of time ..., so throughout eternity is the thought which has *itself* for its object.'⁹³

Immediately following the paragraph in which he argues for the oneness or unity of God, Aristotle goes on to ascribe to God another

attribute traditionally thought of as belonging to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. This is the attribute of *supreme goodness*. Aristotle writes,

[w]e must consider also in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good and the highest good, whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does; for its good is found both in its order and in its leader, and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him. And all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike – both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected.⁹⁴

Last but not least, it should be noted that Aristotle supposed his Unmoved Mover to be a *necessary* being, in the sense that this being could not have not existed. He writes, 'The first mover ... exists of necessity; ... the necessary ... [being] that which cannot be otherwise.'⁹⁵ Aristotle makes this claim having earlier distinguished among the things that exist 'some which are ... of necessity ... because they cannot be otherwise, ... and some [which] are not of necessity nor always'.⁹⁶

In sum, to the Being whom he considered to be the explanation of the world and its broad form, Aristotle ascribed the following attributes: immutability, immateriality, omnipotence, omniscience, oneness or indivisibility, perfect goodness and necessary existence. There is an impressive correspondence between this set of attributes and those traditionally ascribed to God within the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is one that fully justifies us in viewing Aristotle as having had the same Divine Being in mind as the cause of the world that is the object of worship of these two religions.

2.5 Aristotle on the purpose of creation

I have now completed my case for claiming that Aristotle supposed that God is the explanation of the world and its form. This is the first of two constituent sub-theses into which it is possible to resolve the second of the three constituent doctrines which make up what I am calling the classical conception of philosophy. To complete my case for imputing this conception of philosophy to Aristotle in its entirety, it remains only for me to justify my imputing to him the second sub-

thesis into which we have seen the second doctrine may be resolved. This second sub-thesis asserts that God created the world in order that humans, and any other rational creatures whom He might also have created, may acquire knowledge of God and thereby join their Creator in the activity of contemplating Him in which activity God is endlessly and blissfully engaged. I shall seek to justify imputing this thesis to Aristotle by drawing attention to a number of passages drawn from widely disparate works on seemingly unconnected topics. When viewed in isolation from each other, none provides much support for imputing the thesis to Aristotle. Taken in conjunction with one another, their combined evidential support is conclusive. In *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle remarks that

[I]n all things, ... we affirm, Nature always strives after 'the better'. Now 'being' ... is better than 'not-being', but not all things can possess 'being'; since they are too far removed from the 'originative source'. God therefore adopted the remaining alternative, and fulfilled the perfection of the universe by making coming-to-be uninterrupted: ... because that 'coming-to-be should itself come-to-be perpetually' is the closest approximation to eternal being.⁹⁷

This remark reveals that, in Aristotle's view, God created the physical world because being is better than non-being, and that, in creating the world, God sought to make the world as good and perfect as possible. Individual living organisms are incapable of endless survival, yet their being is better than their non-being. Consequently, in seeking to make the world as perfect as possible, God brought about the endless perpetuation of the various species through effecting the endless motion of the heavenly spheres, by means of the mediation of the lesser divinities who animate them. Their endless motion brought about the sun's annual orbit of the earth which is responsible for the annual cycle of seasons. This cycle is in turn responsible for the annual life-cycle of plants and of the lower animals in temperate climes. It is, thus, that these various life-forms are able to perdure perpetually, despite the brevity of the lives of their individual members.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle makes it clear that, in his estimation, human beings rank higher in the scale of perfection than other living organisms. The latter all ultimately exist only for the nutritional and other support they are capable of providing man. Having first declared that 'man, when perfected, is the best of animals',⁹⁸ Aristotle goes on to

state that '[p]lants exist for the sake [of animals], and ... animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for their use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments ... [N]ature makes ... nothing in vain ... she has made all animals for the sake of man.'⁹⁹

That Aristotle considered human beings also to exist for the sake of some end is revealed in a passage from the *Physics*. Here, he writes that

action for an end is present in things which come to be and are by nature. ... Where a series has a completion, all the preceding steps are for the sake of that. ... This is most obvious in the animals other than man. ... It is ... for an end that the swallow makes its nest and the spider its web, and plants grow leaves for the sake of the fruit and send their roots down (not up) for the sake of nourishment.¹⁰⁰

It is not only animals and plants which Aristotle claims exist for some end. He states that everything does which comes into existence by nature. What can be that end for the sake of which man exists? Since we know that Aristotle considered the gods to be self-sufficient and that there is nothing on earth more perfect than man for whose sake man exists, we may infer that, in Aristotle's view, it must be for the sake of achieving some state of himself that man exists. Consequently, we may infer that man exists in order that he may perfect himself. But in what does man's perfection consist? The answer is contained in several other passages. Citing them completes the case for supposing Aristotle to have regarded God as having created the world so that human beings might join God in the activity of contemplating Him, an end-state which becomes possible for them through their exercising the *sophia* they can come to acquire through engaging in philosophy.

The first passage is from the *Politics* and confirms it to have been Aristotle's view that the end for the sake of which human beings exist is the perfection of their rational intellects. It runs:

[I]n all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, ... a distinction between the ruling and the subject element comes to light. Such a duality exists in all living creatures. ... [R]estrict[ing] ourselves to ... living creature[s] which consist of soul and body: of these two, the one is by nature the ruler, and the other the subject. But then we must look for the intentions of nature in things which retain their nature, and not in things which

are corrupted. And therefore we must study the man who is in the most perfect state of both body and soul, for in him we shall see the true relation of the two.... And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate, is natural and expedient.¹⁰¹

The remaining two passages come from the *Nichomachean Ethics*. Jointly, they make clear that, for Aristotle, the final end for the sake of which human beings exist is the perfection of their rational intellects. More specifically, what they make clear is that, for Aristotle, the final end for the sake of which human beings exist, and hence for the sake of which not only plants and animals exist but the heavens also turn, is that they may engage in the activity of *theoria* or contemplation of God having perfected their rational intellects through acquiring *sophia* as a result of having engaged in philosophy. The first passage runs:

[J]ust as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but *it* also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal. There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle ... in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought.... Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say 'a so-and-so' and 'a good so-and-so' have a function which is the same in kind, e.g. a lyre-player and a good lyre-player, ... [the] human good [or final end] turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.¹⁰²

The goal of flute-players, poor ones as well as good ones, is the activity of flute-playing, a good flute-player being one who performs that

activity well. Likewise, the goal or end of human beings will be that form of activity which is the characteristic mode of exercise of whichever is the best and most complete human virtue. Should, as was Aristotle's view, the best and most complete virtue be *sophia* or theoretical wisdom, it will follow that, for him, the final end for the sake of which not just human beings exist, but also the entire animal and vegetable kingdoms do too, even the heavens, is in order that humans can engage in *theoria* or contemplation. For this is the activity in which *sophia* or philosophical wisdom is characteristically exercised.

The second passage is from the final book of the *Nichomachean Ethics* and it bears out the claim that Aristotle did so regard *sophia*. Here Aristotle writes, '[T]he highest ... and ... best thing in us ... [is] our natural ruler and guide and ... take[s] thought of things noble and divine ... [T]he activity of this [element] in accordance with its proper virtue will be [our] perfect happiness. ... [T]his activity is contemplative [activity].'¹⁰³ The element within us which Aristotle thought to be the best one and our natural ruler and guide is *nous* or reason. Its proper excellence, he thought, is *wisdom*, both *practical and theoretical*. Of these two virtues, Aristotle maintained theoretical wisdom to be the superior virtue. The activity in which theoretical wisdom is exercised is *theoria* or contemplation. And the best form of *theoria* is that which takes the most perfect entity as its object. The most perfect entity is God. Thus, we reach our conclusion that, for Aristotle, the end for the sake of which the world exists is so that human beings may engage in the contemplation of God.

In arriving at this conclusion, we complete our task of seeking to defend our imputation of the classical conception of philosophy in its entirety to Aristotle. We have shown that Aristotle maintained God to be the explanation of the world and its form; maintained that God had created the world in order that human beings, and its other rational inhabitants, engage in the activity of contemplating God; and maintained this activity to be that in which their highest happiness consists. How poorly understood Aristotle has become today! What has opened up such a wide gap between Aristotle and present-day philosophers? This is the subject of the next chapter.

3

The Decline and Fall of the Classical Conception

3.1 Philosophy in the age of wisdom

From classical antiquity until well after the dawn of modernity, the classical conception of philosophy enjoyed wide currency, if not hegemony. Not only was it well known throughout this period, it was more or less openly espoused by practically all the major philosophers. From the fifth century CE onwards, however, the conception acquired a largely Christian inflection. Just how dominant the conception was during this period may be seen from the following brief survey of philosophy from the Greeks up to modernity.

Among the various schools of ancient philosophy after those of Plato and Aristotle, among the two most well known and historically influential are those of *Stoicism* and *Neoplatonism*. Both shared Plato's and Aristotle's conception of the nature and goal of philosophy. Because the Stoics were primarily interested in ethics, they displayed less interest in metaphysics than did Plato or Aristotle. Notwithstanding, many Stoics espoused a similar view to Plato and Aristotle that the ultimate goal of philosophy was to engage in the contemplation of God. For example, in his *Moral Discourse*, Epictetus declares that 'God hath introduced man as a spectator of himself and his works; and not only as a spectator, but an interpreter of them. It is therefore shameful that man should begin and end where irrational creatures do. He is indeed rather to begin there, but to end where nature has fixed an end; and that is in contemplation and understanding....'¹

Even closer to the thought of Plato and Aristotle, and of greater historical influence than Stoicism, was Neoplatonism. Of the congeries of views denoted by this term, it has been justly observed that,

'[i]t is this, rather than the Platonism of the dialogues as understood by modern scholars, which we encounter whenever there is a question of Platonic influence on art, literature or philosophy before the nineteenth century, and sometimes even later'.² Because the name of this school alludes to that of Plato, it is often supposed that Neoplatonism is appreciably closer to his thought than it is to that of Aristotle's. This, however, is a misconception. As has been instructively observed, it is '[a] ... particularly superficial and misleading generalisation ... which opposes the "Christian Aristotelianism" of the thirteenth century to the "Platonism" of earlier Christian thinkers. ... There is a strong Aristotelian element in Neoplatonism.... [T]hroughout ... Christian and Islamic thought we find the direct or indirect influence of Aristotle at work again and again.'³

The influence of Aristotle's thought on Neoplatonism is well exhibited in the writings of Plotinus who is unquestionably its chief and most influential representative. His writings were said by Porphyry, the biographer and contemporary of Plotinus, to contain Aristotle's entire *Metaphysics* in condensed form.⁴ Even if this comment is something of an exaggeration, it is clear that Plotinus was every bit as closely wedded to the classical conception of philosophy as Plato and Aristotle had been.

The chief work of Plotinus is a collection of essays known as the *Enneads*. The subject of the sixth essay is beauty. Plotinus begins the essay by differentiating between two kinds of beauty. The first is apprehended by means of the senses, especially sight and hearing. The other kind of beauty, he claims, is only manifest to the intellect by which term, as the context makes clear, he clearly means through philosophical reflection. Of the beauty so apprehensible, he writes, 'minds that lift themselves above the realm of sense to a higher order are aware of beauty ... in the pursuits of the intellect ...'.⁵ According to Plotinus, the form of beauty encountered through pursuits of the intellect surpasses all those which are apprehended through the senses. From what he writes elsewhere, it is clear that, for Plotinus, that beautiful entity which is apprehended through philosophy is God. He writes,

As it is not for those [born blind] to speak of the graceful forms of the material world who have never seen them or known their grace, ... in the same way those must be silent upon the beauty ... of learning ... who have never cared for such things, nor may those tell of the splendour ... of moral-wisdom beautiful beyond the

beauty of Evening and Dawn. Such vision is for those only who see with the soul's sight – and at the vision they will rejoice.⁶

To attain this is for those that will take the upward path... [E]ach in the solitude of himself shall behold that ... from which all things depend, ... the source of life and of Intellection and of being. And one that shall know this vision – with what passion shall he not be seized.⁷

Beholding this Being ... resting, rapt, in the vision and possession of so lofty a loveliness ... all our labour is for this.⁸

Although not a Christian himself, Plotinus' thought was to exert enormous influence upon the theology of that religion. Undoubtedly, the greatest early Christian philosopher is St Augustine. He wrote at a time when the pagan version of the classical conception of philosophy still rivalled Christianity as a world-view. Augustine was fully conversant with the pagan version. He refers to it as 'Platonism' and included within it both Plotinus and Aristotle. Augustine rightly claimed between Platonism and Christianity lay a close affinity. In his *City of God*, he observed, '[w]e rate the Platonists above the rest of the [pagan] philosophers ... [because] the Platonists, coming to a knowledge of God, have found the cause of the organised universe, ... and the spring which offers the drink of felicity. All philosophers who have this conception of God are in agreement with our Idea of him.'⁹ Later in the same work, Augustine explains why God is the source of human happiness. In this proffered explanation, Augustine exposes still more clearly the affinity between his own conception of philosophy and that shared by Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. He writes, 'God ... himself is the source of our bliss, he himself is the goal of all our striving In reaching him we may find our rest, and attain our happiness For our Good, that final Good about which the philosophers dispute, is nothing else but to cleave to him.'¹⁰

Augustine insists, however, that pagan proponents of the classical conception suffer a handicap relative to Christians. Initially they are handicapped by their unawareness, and later by their wilful rejection, of the truths revealed to man by Christ. Augustine directly addresses the pagan philosophers in the following terms: 'You Platonists have some kind of an intuition of the goal to which we must strive,

however dimly seen. . . . You see, to some extent, though from afar off and with clouded vision, the country in which we must find our rest; but you do not keep to the road along which we must travel.¹¹

In Augustine's view, philosophers who do not enjoy the benefit of faith in the Christian revelation are precluded from enjoying as close a union in thought with God as Christians can enjoy. He writes,

[t]he mind of man . . . is too weak to cleave to th[e] changeless light and to enjoy. It must first be renewed and healed day after day so as to become capable of such felicity. And so the mind had to be trained and purified by faith; and in order to give man's mind greater confidence in its journey towards the truth along the way of faith, God the Son took manhood without abandoning his godhead, and thus established this faith, so that man might have a path to man's God through the man that was God.¹²

A century after St Augustine, Boethius was to exhibit a similar wholesale commitment to the classical conception. In his *Consolations of Philosophy*, he argues that philosophy enables its practitioners to enjoy the greatest possible felicity knowable to man. Despite being a Christian himself, Boethius makes this claim on behalf of philosophy *simpliciter*, without its admixture by any specifically Christian doctrines. In the work, philosophy is depicted as an old woman who had been Boethius' teacher and whom Boethius re-encounters, initially without recognising her, while languishing in a state of depression brought on by his current misfortunes. The work opens with Boethius bewailing his lot so.

I who once composed with eager zest; am driven by grief to shelter in sad songs. . . . First fickle Fortune gave me wealth short-lived, then in a moment all but ruined me. Since Fortune changed her trustless countenance, small welcome to the days of prolonging life. Foolish the friends who called me happy then; whose fall shows how my foothold was unsure.¹³

While brooding in this fashion, Boethius becomes aware of the old woman standing over him. 'She was of awe-inspiring appearance, her eyes burning and keen beyond the usual powers of men. . . . [S]ometimes she was of average human size, while at other times she seemed to touch the very sky with the top of her head, and when she lifted herself even higher, she pierced it and was lost to human

sight.¹⁴ Her dishevelled appearance suggests to Boethius that she has suffered abuse at the hands of others. He writes,

Her clothes were made of imperishable material, of the fines thread woven with the most delicate skill. (Later she told me that she had made them with her own hands.) Their colour, however, was obscured by a kind of film as of long neglect.... On the bottom hem could be read the embroidered Greek letter *Pi* [standing for practical philosophy] and on the top hem the Greek letter *Theta* [standing for speculative philosophy or metaphysics]. Her dress had been torn by the hands of marauders who had each carried off such pieces as he could get.¹⁵

When Boethius fails to recognise his former teacher, she reveals her identity to him and goes on to explain his present depression to be the result of his having forgotten her teachings. Philosophy addresses Boethius in the following verses in which the primary consolation of philosophy is revealed to be its capacity to enable its practitioners to escape the vicissitudes of fortune through engaging in *theoria*.

So sinks the mind in deep despair
And sight grows dim; when storms of life
Blow surging up the weight of care,
It banishes its inward light
And turns in trust to the dark without.
This was the man who once was free
To climb the sky zeal devout
To contemplate ...
The spirit that rotates the world,
The cause that translocates the sun
From shining East to watery West ...
Now see that mind that searched and made
All Nature's hidden secrets clear
Lie prostrate prisoner of night.
His neck bends low in shackles thrust,
And he is forced beneath the weight
To contemplate – the lowly dust¹⁶

The old woman agrees to restore Boethius' former good spirits by reacquainting him with her teachings. These turn out to nothing but a demonstration of the existence of God and the world to be a theodicy.

The primary consolation of philosophy is to make its practitioners aware of God and thereby able to engage in the activity of contemplating God, which form of activity is impervious to the vicissitudes of external fortune. Towards the end, Boethius' instructor calls upon God to allow her and her pupil to enjoy a vision of Him. 'Grant, Father, that our minds thy august seat may scan. Grant us the sight of the good's source, and grant us light that we may fix on Thee our mind's unblinded eye. . . . For Thou art rest and peace to those who worship Thee; to see Thee is our end, who art our source and maker, lord and goal.'¹⁷ For Boethius, then, no less than for Epictetus, Plotinus and Augustine, the goal and value of philosophy is no different from what it was for Plato and Aristotle. Its goal is facilitation of the activity of *theoria*, understood as the contemplation of God.

Boethius' book served as a textbook of philosophy until the eleventh century, when Arabic translations of hitherto long-forgotten works of Aristotle, most notably, his *Metaphysics*, began to find their way into western Europe. The recovery of these works led to a philosophical 'renaissance' which culminated in that remarkable synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy and Christian dogma effected by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century. Aquinas, however, was by no means either the only or even the first medieval philosopher to champion the philosophy of Aristotle after the recovery of these long-forgotten works of the latter. A century before Aquinas, another philosopher was led to embrace and expound the thought of Aristotle every bit as enthusiastically as Aquinas was later to do. This was Moses Maimonides upon whose account of Aristotle Aquinas drew heavily.

Towards the end of his *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides proffers an account of religious worship in which he portrays the activity of contemplating God as both the core of the religious life as well as the culminating goal of metaphysics, or 'divine science' as Maimonides preferred to call the latter. Maimonides argues that the teachings of the Bible coincide with those of Aristotle in so far as both teach the supreme value of this form of activity. He writes:

The worship peculiar to those who have apprehended the true realities [that is, have studied metaphysics – D.C.] is to set their thought to work on God alone after they have acquired knowledge of Him. . . . [T]hose who . . . after having attained perfection in divine science . . . turn wholly toward God . . . direct all the acts of their intellect toward an examination of the [other] beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know

His government of them in whatever way is possible.... The Torah has made it clear that this ... worship ... can only be engaged in after apprehension has been achieved; it says: To love the Lord your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut. II.13).... That Love is proportionate to apprehension. After love comes ... worship ... [which] consists in setting thought to work on the first intelligible and in devoting oneself exclusively to this as far as this is within one's capacity.... Thus it is clear that after apprehension, total devotion to Him and the employment of intellectual thought in constantly loving Him should be aimed at. Mostly this is achieved in solitude and isolation. Hence every excellent man stays frequently in solitude and does not meet anyone unless it is necessary.¹⁸

What Maimonides here portrays as the kernel of true religion is nothing other than the practice of *theoria* as conceived of by Aristotle. In his *Guide*, Maimonides goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the supreme value of *theoria* is a doctrine which is esoterically espoused by Hebrew Scriptures and that it forms the inner truth of Judaism. Of the Jewish Patriarchs and Moses, Maimonides claims that

The end of all their efforts was to spread the doctrine of the unity of the Name in the world and to guide people to love Him.... The end of the actions prescribed by the whole [Mosaic] law is to bring about the passion of which it is correct that it be brought about [– viz. the love and fear of God].... True human perfection ... consists in the acquisition of the rational virtues – [or] true opinions concerning the divine things. This is in true reality the ultimate end.... The perfection of which one should be proud and that one should desire is knowledge of Him ... which is the true science.... All the actions prescribed by the law – ... the various species of worship and also the moral habits that are useful to all people in their mutual dealings – [are] but preparations made for the sake of this end. The perfection of man ... is the one acquired by him who has achieved, in a measure corresponding to his capacity, apprehension of Him ... and who knows His providence extending over His creatures as manifested in the act of bringing them into being and in their governance. That way of life of such an individual, after he has achieved this apprehension, will always have in view *loving-kindness, righteousness, and judgement*, through assimilating to His actions.¹⁹

Maimonides exerted a great influence upon Aquinas in his understanding of Aristotle. Despite the initial misgivings on the part of the Catholic Church about the potential for conflict between Aristotelian philosophy and Christianity, Aquinas came to endorse and propound the classical conception of philosophy in the form in which it had been taught by Aristotle every bit as fully and enthusiastically as Maimonides had done. The following two quotations from Aquinas illustrate the depth of his attachment to this conception.

The end of our desire is God. So the act by which we are primarily united to him is originally and essentially our happiness. But through the act of the intellect we are primarily united to him, and so the vision of God, which is an intellectual act, is essentially and originally our happiness.²⁰

As the philosopher [— that is, Aristotle] says in *Ethics* X, the final happiness of man consists in the best activity of man's highest power, that is, of the intellect with respect to the best intelligible object. Since an effect is known through its cause, it is plain that the cause is by nature more intelligible than the effect.... Hence, ... the first cause of things is by nature the greatest and best intelligible thing.... Therefore it is necessary that the final happiness of man that he is able to have in this life consists in the consideration of the first causes.... Hence the principal goal of the philosophers was that by means of all they considered in things, they might arrive at a knowledge of first causes.... Divine science considers the first causes of things.²¹

The steady recovery of ancient Greek texts from the eleventh century onwards culminated in that enormous explosion of interest in and admiration for all things classical known as the Renaissance. This term refers to the intellectual and artistic developments in Europe in the three centuries between the beginning of the fourteenth and the end of the sixteenth. It is a period which remains a relatively neglected episode within the history of philosophy, since it did not give rise to any philosophers of comparable stature to those who stand either side of it, such as Aquinas and Descartes. The main philosophical development during the Renaissance was the rise of a philosophical outlook which later centuries have come to call *humanism*. As this name implies, this outlook gives pride of place to human personality as opposed either to God or nature. It would be a profound mistake,

however, to suppose Renaissance humanism ever to have been at all at odds with the classical conception of philosophy. Renaissance humanism is not to be confused with later tendencies of thought which have also been referred to as humanism and which are marked by a militant anti-religiosity. The term was first used in the nineteenth century to apply to Renaissance thought. It was then intended to connote only the interest which had been shown by Renaissance thinkers from Petrarch onwards in the ideal of a liberal education focusing on the liberal arts or *litterae humaniores* which had been extolled by Cicero and other classical authors.²² A brief consideration of two eminent Renaissance philosophers suffices to show in what high regard the classical conception of philosophy was held during this period, even among humanists.

Our first illustrative Renaissance philosopher is Marsilio Ficino. In his history of western philosophy, David Hamlyn gives Ficino short shrift, dismissing his thought as not 'philosophically important'.²³ This seems a somewhat harsh assessment, seeing how, as Oskar Kristeller has observed, Ficino was 'the most central and most influential representative of Renaissance Platonism',²⁴ and responsible almost single-handedly for the rehabilitation of Plato's philosophy after its relative eclipse by Aristotle's, following the recovery of the latter's writings in the late medieval period. In his *Platonic Theology*, Ficino makes unequivocally clear how thorough was his commitment to the classical conception of philosophy. He writes,

Plato, the father of philosophers, understood very well ... that all intelligences are ... unable to understand anything whatsoever without ... God.... [H]e exhorts us to enquire into these causes [of natural things] in such a way that in the end we may find the cause of all causes and adore it when we have found it.... [E]veryone who reads Plato's writings ... will derive from them every conceivable benefit, but above all these two most important principles: the pious worship of a known God and the divinity of souls. These form the basis for all understanding of things ... and for all aspects of happiness.... My main aim in writing this treatise has been to enable us to explore in the divinity of our own created mind, as if in a mirror placed at the centre of the universe, the works of the creator himself and to contemplate and worship his mind.... This is the first commandment of almighty God.... This is what the divine Plato once effortlessly achieved, with the help of God, for the benefit of his followers.²⁵

Ficino goes on to elaborate how it becomes possible to engage in the activity of *theoria*. In words which echo those of the opening book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he writes,

Our soul conceives a universal notion of truth and goodness which prompts it to seek the universal truth and aspire to the universal good. All truths are contained in the universal truth, and all goods in the universal good. This explains why the soul naturally seeks all truths and naturally aspires to all goods.... Now, the sum of all goods is God himself, who is the first truth and the first good. Therefore, it is God himself whom we seek.... But what is it that we desire above all in him? To become similar to him.... We can only become similar to God if we make him the object of our thinking, since the intellect becomes similar to other things whenever it makes them the object of its thinking and is thus transformed into images of them. Our goal, therefore, is to see God by means of our intellect and to enjoy the vision of God by means of our will, since our highest good is the highest object of our highest faculty or the most perfect act related to that highest object ... [and] ... [t]heir highest object is ... God.

[S]ince we wish to understand the cause of every known effect, and since our intellect knows universal being itself, it follows that we have a natural desire to know the cause of being itself, which is God himself. And it is only when our natural desire is entirely appeased that we can claim to have attained our ultimate goal. That is why the ultimate goal of man consists solely in the knowledge or the possession of God, which alone is able to put an end to our natural appetite. A clear indication of this is the fact that everyone rejoices most when he has attained his own goal. And no possession whatever fills the soul with such ardent, pure and lasting joy as the foretaste, however small, of the contemplation of God. Those who have truly experienced it rate all possessions, the whole world and even their own life as nothing in comparison. Whoever lives piously in the company of God, even if only from time to time, will proclaim that it was only in those moments that he truly lived and was sheltered from evil and had some foretaste of the good – as if it were only in those moments that he entered into his own proper haven.... [I]t is only where the good that is the source of all goods reigns supreme that we can find a remedy for all our ills.²⁶

Our second illustrative Renaissance philosopher is the humanist, Desiderius Erasmus, whose most well-known work is entitled *The Praise of Folly*. It might seem odd to the point of paradox that a work with such a title composed by a Renaissance humanist could have been written with the purpose of extolling the classical conception of philosophy. Yet, so Erasmus makes clear, the 'folly' that he seeks to praise is only so considered by fools. What Erasmus praises under the term 'folly' is nothing but the activity of *theoria* or the joyful contemplation of God, an activity, Erasmus also makes it clear, to which it is as possible to be led by means of philosophy as it is by means of religious devotional practice. He writes,

Th[e] happiness of Christians, which they pursue with so much toil, is nothing but a kind of madness and folly. . . . The Christians and Platonicks do as good as agree in this, that the soul is plung'd and fettered in the prison of the body, by the grossness of which it is so ty'd up and hindered, that it cannot take a view of or enjoy things as they truly are. . . . [W]hen, having broke its fetters, it endeavours to get loose, and assayes, as it were, a flight out of that prison that holds it in, they call it madness. . . . [T]he common sort of men chiefly admire those things that are corporeal, and almost believe there is nothing beyond 'em. Whereas on the contrary, . . . devout persons . . . are wholly hurry'd away with the contemplation of things invisible. . . . The one give the first place to riches, the next to their corporeal pleasures, leaving the last place to their soul; which yet most of 'em do scarce believe, because they can't see it with their eyes. On the contrary, the others first rely wholly on God, the most unchangeable of all things.²⁷

Erasmus goes on to describe the life of the spirit after which the devout and the wise aspire and which they shall enjoy for eternity in the hereafter, when death will have disencumbered them of their bodies and thereby freed them from the multiple distractions to contemplation which embodiment brings. He writes,

[T]he spirit shall swallow up the Body, . . . and . . . the spirit . . . shall be wonderfully swallow'd up by that highest mind . . .; so that the whole man is no[t] to be otherwise happy in any respect, but that being stript of himself, he shall participate of somewhat ineffable from that chiefest good that draws all things into itself. . . . [T]he life of holy men is nothing but a continu'd meditation and, as it were,

shadow of that life.... [T]hough it be but as the smallest drop in comparison of that fountain of eternal happiness, yet it far surpasses all worldly delight, though all the pleasures of all mankind were all join'd together.... [T]hey that are sensible of it ... suffer a kind of somewhat little differing from madness ... and when they come to themselves, ... they are sorry they are come to themselves again, and desire nothing more than this kind of madness, to be perpetually mad. And this is a small taste of that future happiness.²⁸

In sum, we can say of philosophy up to the Renaissance what was said about the subject between classical antiquity and the early Middle Ages by the editor of the most comprehensive survey of philosophy during this period. 'Philosophy ... was ... "an all-embracing activity concerned with everything relevant to the ultimate purpose of human life". This accounts for ..., to the modern mind, the disconcertingly close connexion between philosophy and religion which we find in nearly all the thinkers of the period, in the Greek pagans as much as in the adherents of revealed religions.'²⁹

3.2 The Copernican Revolution

So far as philosophy is concerned, the great watershed separating pre-modernity from modernity is not the Renaissance. It is, rather, a later episode in the history of European thought which could not have occurred without the recovery of the many ancient Greek texts which occurred during the Renaissance. The great watershed separating pre-modernity from modernity is the seventeenth-century intellectual revolution known as the Copernican Revolution. In this intellectual upheaval, the geocentric cosmology which had held sway since the time of Plato and Aristotle was replaced, initially, by a simple form of heliocentrism, and, subsequently, by a still more radically different conception of the universe as unbounded and without any centre and governed by entirely different laws from those by which the universe had formerly been supposed bound. The earth became regarded as a satellite of the sun rather than, as it had formerly been, the unmoving centre of the universe.

Such a change of world-view could not fail but to have profound philosophical implications. Not the least of these was the wholesale repudiation of the previously almost sacrosanct distinction between the sub-lunary and the celestial realms. This distinction had been

incorporated by Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, as well as in geocentric physics and cosmology more generally. With the removal of the basis for supposing events in the terrestrial realm subject to different laws from those governing the celestial realm, the way became open for a revival of ancient Greek atomism. This occurred in the form of the corpuscularianism championed by Robert Boyle and John Locke. This physical theory supplied the grounds for the distinction between the ontologically objective primary qualities of shape, size, number and motion, and the mind-dependent subjective secondary qualities, such as colour, smell and taste. Such a distinction greatly aided the development of a mathematical approach towards the understanding of natural phenomena which has been the hallmark of natural science ever since. More than anything else, it has been the adoption of a quantitative approach towards the investigation of nature inaugurated by the Copernican Revolution that serves to mark off modernity from the pre-modern period.

Although originally developed and articulated within the framework of a geocentric cosmology, the classical conception of philosophy is not inherently incompatible with either heliocentrism or a mathematical approach to the understanding of nature. Almost without exception, all the major philosophers most closely associated with the Copernican Revolution explicitly subscribed to the classical conception of philosophy. Nothing could be further from the truth than to suppose that, because the classical conception of philosophy was first expounded within the terms of a geocentric cosmology, the case for theism on which this conception rests is somehow dependent upon the supposed truth of geocentrism and has no validity outside such a cosmological framework. That the classical conception of philosophy is independent of geocentrism is borne out by the fact that it was espoused by practically all the major seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century philosophers who pioneered and championed this revolution in thought. As I shall now show, this includes not just Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, but also several later thinkers.

Descartes is usually considered the father of modern philosophy and rightly so. For he was the first self-consciously to seek and effect a decisive break with the past, especially Aristotelian physics. Over the question of the purpose and value of philosophy, however, Descartes remains every bit as wedded to the classical conception as the majority of his classical and medieval predecessors had been. This is made plain by a letter of Descartes to the translator of the French edition of his *Principles of Philosophy* which subsequently became, as he had

intended, the preface to that work. In this letter, Descartes sets out his conception of philosophy. He writes,

Philosophy signifies the study of wisdom, ... and by wisdom we not only understand prudence in affairs, but also a perfect knowledge of all things that man can know.... We can have no greater good than the possession of true philosophy.... Speaking accurately, living without philosophy is just having the eyes closed without trying to open them; and the pleasure of seeing everything that is revealed to our sight, is not comparable to the satisfaction which is given by the knowledge of those things which are opened up to us by philosophy.... Men, in whom the principal part is the mind, ought to make their principal care the search after wisdom, which is its true source of nutriment.... There does not exist the soul so ignoble, so firmly attached to objects of sense, that it does not sometimes turn away from these to aspire after some other greater good, even though it is frequently ignorant as to wherein that good consists.... [T]his sovereign good ... is none other than the knowledge of the truth through its first causes, i.e. the wisdom whose study is philosophy.³⁰

Descartes goes on to describe as the highest point in human wisdom, as well as the means for attaining the sovereign good of man, the adoption of two methodological principles propounded in the book of which this letter was to become the preface. The first of these principles is that, in the first instance, we should give our assent only to those propositions whose truth we have clearly and distinctly perceived. The second principle is that we should also give our assent to whatever other propositions we can deduce from those which have been clearly and distinctly perceived to be true.

Descartes claims that the highest possible good for man results from the adoption of these principles because their adoption leads to an intuitive knowledge of the existence of the self as a thinking thing, and, subsequently, on the basis of this first certainty, to a demonstrative knowledge of the existence of God. It was, for Descartes, no less than it was for Aristotle, the knowledge of God's existence to which philosophy leads that enables the philosopher to gain the highest possible good for man. It is well known that Descartes claimed God's existence to be capable of being demonstrated. It is not nearly so widely known, although it is hardly of less importance, that Descartes also supposed, as did other exponents of the classical conception, that

the highest possible form of human happiness consists in the intellectual love, or contemplation, of God, an activity which is made possible by the knowledge of God which philosophy brings.

Descartes' best-known work is his *Meditations*, a work in which he seeks to determine in general terms those matters about which human beings can gain certain knowledge. The Third Meditation purports to contain a demonstrative proof of God's existence. Here, having set out the proof, Descartes is about to consider what other certainties it is possible for him to arrive at on the strength of this one, when he breaks off from his main task to enter the following highly significant aside. He writes,

But before I ... pass on to the consideration of other truths which may be derived from it [viz. God's existence], it seems to me right to pause for a while in order to contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvellous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore, the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which is in some measure dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so. For just as faith teaches us that the supreme felicity of the other life consists only in this contemplation of the Divine Majesty, so we continue to learn by experience that a similar meditation, though incomparably less perfect, causes us to enjoy the greatest satisfaction of which we are capable in this life.³¹

Descartes returned to this theme in a letter to his close friend, Pierre Chanut. He was the French ambassador to Sweden who was responsible for securing for Descartes an invitation from Queen Christina to visit her there to instruct her in philosophy. In this letter, Descartes responds to several queries which Chanut had previously raised. Among these is the question whether 'the natural light [of reason] alone teaches us to love God'. Descartes answers this question as follows. 'I do not doubt that we can truly love God by the sole force of our nature. ... I venture to say that in regard to this life, it is the most ravishing and most useful passion we can have – and even that it can be the strongest, although that requires a very attentive meditation because we are continually diverted by the presence of other objects.'³² Descartes goes on to explain how the sentiment of love towards God can best be cultivated. In so doing, he offers a highly instructive description of what he takes the activity of contemplating God to involve. He writes,

[O]ne must consider God a mind, or a thing that thinks; so that the nature of our mind, having some resemblance to his, we come to persuade ourselves it is an emanation of the sovereign intelligence 'and, as it were, a particle of the divine gold' [Horace]. . . . [I]f, in addition we heed the infinity of his power, through which he has created so many things, of which we are the least part; the extension of his providence, that makes him see in one thought alone everything that has been, is, shall be, and could be; the infallibility of his decrees, which, although they do not disturb our free will, nevertheless cannot in any fashion be changed; and finally, if, on the one hand, we heed our insignificance, and if, on the other hand, we heed the grandeur of all created things, by noting the manner in which they depend on God and by considering them in a fashion that has a relationship to his omnipotence, without confining them in a globe, as do they who think the world finite: meditation upon all this so abundantly fills the man who hears it with such extreme joy that, . . . willingly and entirely joining himself to God, he loves God so perfectly that he desires nothing more in the world than that God's will be done. That is the reason he no longer fears either death, or pains, or disgraces, because he knows that nothing can happen to him save what God shall have decreed; and he so loves this divine decree, esteems it so just and so necessary, knows he ought so entirely to depend upon it, that even when he awaits death or some other evil, if *per impossible* he could change that decree, he would not wish to do so. But if he does not refuse evils or afflictions, because they come to him from divine providence, he refuses still less all the goods or licit pleasures one can enjoy in this life, because they too issue from that providence, and accepting them with joy, without having any fear of evils, his love renders him perfectly happy.³³

Spinoza and Leibniz were to espouse similar views to those of Descartes on this subject. Spinoza is often claimed to have been an atheist. Despite Spinoza's conception of God being highly heterodox, having equated God with nature, it makes a mockery of this thought to regard him as an atheist. As he remarked in protest at this estimate of him, 'I would ask whether a man throws off all religion who maintains that God must be acknowledged as the highest good, and must, as such, be loved with a free mind?'³⁴ The work in which Spinoza expresses these theistic doctrines is the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. This work also contains a clear statement of Spinoza's allegiance to the

classical conception. There he writes,

The highest good [is] the true knowledge and love of God.... [For] in as much as the intellect is the best part of our being, it is evident that we should make every effort to perfect it as far as possible if we desire ... what is really profitable to us.... [S]ince all our knowledge, and the certainty which removes every doubt, depend solely on the knowledge of God ... it follows that our highest good and perfection also depend solely on the knowledge of God.... Further, since without God nothing can exist or be conceived, it is evident that all natural phenomena involve and express the conception of God in proportion as far as their essence and perfection extend, so that we have greater and more perfect knowledge of God in proportion to our knowledge of natural phenomena.... So, then, our highest good not only depends on the knowledge of God, but wholly consists therein..., and hence the most perfect and the chief sharer in the highest blessedness is he who prizes above all else, and takes especial delight in, the intellectual knowledge of God, the most perfect being.³⁵

Leibniz, too, equates man's highest good with the contemplation of God, a form of activity that philosophy makes possible. He wrote,

Since God is the most perfect and the most happy and consequently the most lovable of substances, and since *our true love* consists in the state which causes pleasure to be felt in the perfections and happiness of the beloved, this love ought to give us the greatest pleasure of which a man is capable when God is the object of it.... It is easy to love him as we ought ... if we know him.... [L]ove of God gives us here and now a foretaste of future felicity. And ... it constitutes our greatest good.... It is true that supreme happiness (with whatever *beatific vision*, or knowledge of God, it may be accompanied) can never be complete because God, being infinite, cannot be entirely known. Thus our happiness will never consist, and ought not to consist, in a complete enjoyment, in which there would be nothing left to desire, ... but in a perpetual progress to new pleasures and new perfections.³⁶

Similar views to those espoused by the so-called rationalists were also expressed by English philosophers and divines of the same period. For example, Benjamin Whichcote, the founder of Cambridge Platonism,

equates the highest human happiness with the contemplation of God, claiming such a form of activity to be made possible by the knowledge of God at which man is capable of arriving through philosophical reflection. Whichcote states these views in his sermon, 'The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion'. Here, Whichcote remarks that '[i]t is the natural and proper employment of the mind and understanding to make search and enquiry after God. . . . Mind and understanding is given on purpose that man should search after God and acknowledge him.'³⁷ In another of his sermons, 'The Manifestation of Christ and the Deification of Man', Whichcote claims 'there is more pleasure and satisfaction in *contemplation*, than in any of the pleasures of sense; and . . . those men that live apart from the world, and are taken up in meditation, and contemplation, their pleasures are more intense and solid, than those of the licentious, and of such as please themselves in the gratification of sense'.³⁸ He adds that 'man being made to know God, . . . he is made happy in the enjoyment of Him'.³⁹ Accordingly, he goes on to observe, 'if a man be separated from God, his mind and understanding are without their proper object . . . if we give ourselves up to meditation upon God, . . . we do thereby ennoble and enlarge our faculties'.⁴⁰

The view espoused by Whichcote in these quoted passages was by no means confined to divines in England during this period. It was shared, arguably, by no less a scientific authority than Isaac Newton. The General Scholium with which Newton concludes his *Principia* reveals the strength of his attachment to theism. It also suggests that, as well as believing theism to be fully compatible with the new cosmology, Newton was not without sympathy for the classical conception of philosophy. He writes,

This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. . . . This Being governs all things . . . as the Lord over all; and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called *Lord God*. . . . The Supreme God is a Being eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect . . . a living, intelligent, and powerful Being; . . . supreme, or most perfect. He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; . . . he governs all things, and knows all things that are or can be done. . . . He endures for ever. . . . [T]he supreme God exists necessarily. . . . He is utterly void of all body and bodily figure. . . . We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things and final causes; we admire him for his perfections; but we

reverence and adore him on account of his dominion.⁴¹

The classical conception of philosophy continued to be explicitly espoused in Britain well into the eighteenth century. For instance, in his dialogue, 'The Moralists', Shaftesbury has one of its principal interlocutors go off into the countryside early one morning in order to be able to commune with nature which he addresses in the following terms:

Ye fields and woods, my refuge from the toilsome world of business, receive me in your quiet sanctuaries, and favour my retreat and thoughtful solitude ... with its beloved tranquillity it affords a happy leisure and retreat for man, who, made for contemplation, and to search his own and other natures, may here best meditate the causes of things, and, placed amidst the various scenes of Nature, may ... nearer view her works.... O glorious nature ... whose study brings such wisdom, and whose contemplation such delight.... O mighty Nature! Wise substitute of providence! Impowered Creatress! Or thou Impowering Deity, supreme creator...! Since by thee, o sovereign mind, I have been formed such as I am, intelligent and rational, the peculiar dignity of my nature is to know and contemplate thee, ... since ... nor love of aught save thee alone inspires me with such thoughts as thee, be then my assistant and guide in this pursuit, whilst I venture to tread the labyrinth of wide Nature and endeavour to trace thee in thy works.⁴²

Again, in his *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, Francis Hutcheson, for example, claims that 'the knowledge and love of the Deity ... is as natural a perfection to such a being as man, as any accomplishment to which we arrive by cultivating our natural dispositions; nor is that mind come to the proper state and vigour of its kind where religion is not the main exercise and delight'.⁴³ Adam Smith echoes the same sentiment, albeit more softly, when he claims that the idea of God is 'of all the objects of human contemplation by far the most sublime'.⁴⁴ He goes on to remark that '[t]he man whom we believe to be principally occupied in this sublime contemplation, seldom fails to be the object of our highest veneration; and though his life should be altogether contemplative, we often regard him with a sort of religious respect, much superior to that with which we look upon the most active and useful servant of the commonwealth'.⁴⁵

In sum, that set of doctrines which I am calling the classical conception of philosophy was neither unknown to, nor had it been repudiated by, those philosophers who were most instrumental in or immediately influenced by the Copernican Revolution. Nonetheless, during the course of the eighteenth century, this conception of philosophy was increasingly to come under fire. So much was this so that, by the end of the century, it had become mortally wounded, and, before the end of the following century, had all but expired. Our task now is to consider what led to its downfall.

3.3 God's unwilling executioners

If it was not the emergence of modern science *per se* that was responsible for the demise of the classical conception of philosophy, who or what was? How did God come to be evicted from His traditional abode at the heart of the philosophical enterprise? For having effected this monumental transformation in human thought, credit or blame must largely go to a trio of philosophers. Two come from the eighteenth century, the third from the nineteenth. More than anyone else, it has been the combined influence of their thought that has been responsible for the steadily increasing secularisation of philosophy that has occurred since the end of the eighteenth century. The three philosophers are David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche: Hume is father of modern naturalism; Kant of modern anti-realism; and Nietzsche of currently fashionable post-modernism.

As we have seen, the cosmological change effected during the Copernican Revolution neither posed, nor, at the time, was thought to have posed, any immediate challenge or threat to God's existence. It did, however, indirectly call into question all those religious doctrines which had purportedly been disclosed by means of revelation. This is because the accounts given of their revelation in the Bible were couched in terms of a geocentric cosmology which had been decisively discredited by the Copernican Revolution. The new cosmology, therefore, could not fail to call into question the status and authority of the text in which the account of the revelation of these doctrines was given. Hence, by implication, it could not fail to call into question the doctrines supposedly revealed. To all who bothered to think about it, therefore, there was a glaringly obvious *prima facie* incompatibility between the geocentric cosmology unselfconsciously assumed in the Bible and the heliocentrism which had gained ascendancy in the seventeenth century. This seeming incompatibility

between the Bible and the new science issued in the eighteenth century in a great efflorescence of natural and revealed theology which was designed to reconcile the two. It was essentially this body of theology against which Hume and Kant were to react with such historic effect.

Natural theology blossomed as apologists for Christianity sought to provide for their most cherished religious convictions a new rational basis that would insulate them from the challenge which the new sciences had not spared those religious doctrines based purely on the authority of the Bible. The provision of a new rational basis for religious belief was accomplished in one or other of two ways. First, as had been done in the past when the Bible appeared at variance with empirical fact, biblical narratives became subject to non-literal interpretation so as to be squared with the new science. Second, as was to become increasingly common, attempts were made to provide religious convictions with a rationally unimpeachable warrant through representing them as the deliverance of reason alone, unaided by any putative divine acts of revelation.

To assert that the eighteenth century witnessed a huge increase of interest in and preoccupation with the subject of natural theology is not to suggest that until then no significant developments had taken place in this subject since its inception in classical antiquity. Ever since its original formulation by the ancient Greeks, natural theology had been the constant focus of attention of theologians and philosophers who had endlessly elaborated and refined it. Arguably, however, during the two millennia that separate Plato and Aristotle from Hume and Kant, only one major new argument had been propounded for the existence of God. This was the so-called *Ontological Argument*, first formulated by St Anselm in the twelfth century. This argument purports to establish the existence of God solely through unpacking what is involved in the idea of a most perfect Being. In what follows, this argument will not be considered, nor will the criticisms levelled against it by Hume and Kant. This is so for two reasons. First, since our chief concern is with the classical conception of philosophy, our prime interest is only with such arguments for God as posit God as the only or best explanation of the world and the order it manifests. Second, like many classical and contemporary authorities, I do not regard the Ontological Argument as being anywhere near as formidable an argument for God as, so I shall argue, are each of two other arguments for God on which proponents of the classical conception of philosophy have always been principally reliant. These are the so-

called *Cosmological Argument* and the *Argument from Design*. In what follows, therefore, only these two arguments and the objections against them levelled by Hume and Kant will be considered.

Of the three philosophers who I have claimed were chiefly responsible for God's removal from philosophy, only Hume appears to have had any genuine sympathy for, or much understanding of, the classical conception of philosophy. He hints at his predilection for it in a letter of his written to a friend when Hume was only 16 years old. Hume wrote,

The perfectly wise man ... outbraves fortune. ... [T]his pastoral and Saturnian happiness, I have, in a great measure come at just now. ... This greatness and elevation of soul is to be found only in study and contemplation. This alone can teach us to look down on human accidents. ... [A]llow [me] to talk thus like a philosopher: 'tis a subject I think much on, and could talk all day of.⁴⁶

Hume further reveals his depth of understanding of and sympathy for the classical conception in a brief essay of his in which he offers a statement of the credo of an imaginary figure whom Hume calls the 'Platonist'. He is intended to represent one of four perennial types of philosopher who, according to Hume, 'naturally form themselves in the world and entertain different ideas of human life and happiness ...'.⁴⁷ The three other perennial types to which Hume devotes separate essays are the 'Epicurean', the 'Stoic' and the 'Sceptic', the last espousing the viewpoint which corresponds most closely with Hume's own. The account which Hume gives of the credo of the Platonist indicates how thoroughly conversant with the classical conception of philosophy Hume was and suggests that its attractions could not have been wholly lost upon him. Hume has his Platonist declaim that

A rational soul made for the contemplation of the Supreme Being, and of his works, ... [can] [n]ever enjoy tranquillity or satisfaction, while detained in the ignoble pursuits of sensual pleasure or popular applause. The Divinity is a boundless ocean of bliss and glory: human minds are smaller streams, which arising at first from the ocean, seek still, amid all their wanderings, to return to it, and to lose themselves in that immensity of perfection. ... Can we ... be so blind as not to discover an intelligence and a design in the exquisite and most stupendous contrivance of the universe? Can

we be so stupid as not to feel the warmest raptures of worship and adoration upon the contemplation of that intelligent being, so infinitely good and wise?... The most perfect happiness surely must arise from the contemplation of the most perfect object. But what more perfect than beauty and virtue? And where is beauty to be found equal to that of the universe, or virtue which can be compared to the benevolence and justice of the Deity? ... It is our comfort, that if we employ worthily the faculties here assigned us, they will ... render us ... suitable worshippers of our Maker; and that ... task, which can never be finished in time, will be the business of an eternity.⁴⁸

It is not surprising that Hume should have been so conversant with the classical conception and its attractions. For, by disposition, he seems not to have been at all atheistic, or even agnostic. The most authoritative biographer of Hume informs us that he 'gave up [religion] slowly and reluctantly, even against his will, as it were, in the face of what he regarded as ineluctable logic'.⁴⁹ To an assembled gathering of French *philosophes* which included the notorious atheist, Baron D' Holbach, Hume reputedly remarked that he had never met an atheist in his life and did not believe in their existence. This quip supposedly drew from D' Holbach the riposte that sympathy was due Hume for having the misfortune of finding himself in the company of no less than 17 of them!⁵⁰

If taken at his word, Hume would apparently have liked nothing better than to have been able to provide a secure basis for religious belief. To a friend who had urged him to assist him in finding philosophical arguments to support theism, Hume replied,

Whatever you can think of to strengthen that side of the argument will be most acceptable to me. *Any propensity you imagine I have to the other side crept in upon me against my will...* [B]efore I was twenty, ... the gradual progress of my thoughts on this head ... began with an anxious scent after arguments to confirm the common opinion; doubts stole in, dissipated, returned; were again dissipated, returned again; and it was a perpetual struggle of a restless imagination against inclination – perhaps against reason.... I wish ... [the theistic] argument could be so analysed as to be rendered quite formal and regular.... We must endeavour to prove that th[e] propensity [towards accepting it] is somewhat different from our inclination to find our own figures in the clouds, our faces

in the moon, our passions and sentiments even in inanimate matter. Such an inclination may and ought to be controlled, and can never be a legitimate ground of assent. [My emphasis]⁵¹

Despite apparently having considerable sympathy with, if not a native propensity for, religious belief, Hume has not come to be remembered as an apologist for religion, and not without good reason. However genuinely reluctant he may have been to discredit the basis for religious belief, Hume, together with Kant, is one of the chief and most influential assailants of theism. Hume has been justly described as 'the real father of positivist philosophy – chronologically the first thinker we may call positivist without making any of the reservations we have to make with earlier thinkers'.⁵²

Kant appears to have had far less sympathy for, or even comprehension of, the classical conception of philosophy than Hume did. Kant reveals this in what he wrote on the one occasion on which he discussed the several ideals of the different schools of ancient Greek philosophy. Like Hume, Kant identifies one that he calls 'the Platonic ideal'.⁵³ He equates this ideal with 'man see[ing] himself in communion with the highest being'.⁵⁴ As a characterisation of the Platonic ideal, Kant's description seems wide of the mark. As Kant uses the term 'communion', it suggests he had in mind a far more interactive relation between man and God than obtains between them when the former contemplates the latter in the activity of *theoria*. Kant dismisses the ideal on grounds of its unattainability. He writes, "An immediacy of union with the Supreme Being", were it possible, would be the highest moral perfection to which we could attain. This, however, is an ideal which is beyond our reach.... Such ethics is fanciful and visionary.⁵⁵ Kant provides no reason why it should be thought beyond human reach to engage in the contemplation of God. Nor does Kant give any indication that he was aware that nothing more than the contemplation of God was involved in the Platonic conception of the supreme human good.

Despite his lack of sympathy with, even apparent comprehension of, the classical conception of philosophy, Kant, in many respects, was far more religiously inclined than Hume. Kant's religious susceptibilities are revealed by the account which he reputedly gave of his reaction to an incident he witnessed late in his life. The incident in question was that of a swallow expelling some of her brood from her nest, which Kant interpreted had been prompted to ensure the survival of at least some of the brood, given the depleted food supplies

available after an inclement summer. On recounting his reaction to this incident, Kant is reputed to have said, 'My intelligence stood still. There was nothing to do but to fall on one's knees and worship.' The friend to whom Kant supposedly related the incident remarked of Kant's demeanour at the time, '[t]he devout awe which glowed in his venerable face, the tone of his voice, the way he clasped his hands, his enthusiasm – it was all unique'.⁵⁶

Despite strenuously opposing speculative theology, Kant made it clear that he had no intention to discredit belief in God. Indeed, he claimed the chief merit of his own system of critical philosophy to be that it had secured religious faith from otherwise unassailable rational doubt. In the Preface to the second edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant explains how his philosophy will 'benefit the public without their knowing it'.⁵⁷ He writes,

[B]y means of a thorough investigation of the rights of speculative reason, [it is possible] once and for all, to prevent the scandal which, sooner or later, is sure to break out among the masses, as the result of the disputes in which metaphysicians (and, as such, finally also the clergy) inevitably become involved to the consequent perversion of their teaching. Criticism alone can sever the root of ... *atheism*.⁵⁸

In developing his critical philosophy, it was, no doubt, part of his objective to demonstrate the indemonstrability of the truth of theism. However, he considered himself to have made an invaluable contribution to securing the reasonableness of religious faith by also having demonstrated the indemonstrability of God's non-existence. As he put it, he had 'found it necessary to deny *knowledge* [of God], in order to make room for *faith*'.⁵⁹

The editor of an anthology of Kant's writings is, thus, correct to describe Kant as 'a profoundly religious man'. This same editor seems mistaken, however, when he goes on to state that 'Kant would have dearly loved to give a theoretical proof [of God's existence] himself'.⁶⁰ On the contrary, Kant positively welcomed the indemonstrability of God's existence. He argued, not altogether convincingly,⁶¹ that possession of such a proof would foreclose to us the possibility of moral goodness. In order to be morally good, on his view, our actions must be motivated from a pure sense of duty alone, unmixed by any other motive. A demonstrative knowledge of God's existence, he claimed, would prevent us from being able to obey the moral law

except from a self-interested concern to avoid divine punishment for disobedience. Conformity with the moral law would no longer stem from a regard to duty alone, but from self-interest. Kant puts this point as follows in his *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*:

Our faith is not scientific knowledge, and thank heaven it is not! For God's wisdom is apparent in the very fact that we do not *know* that God exists, but should *believe* that God exists. For suppose that we could attain to scientific knowledge of God's existence. . . . Then, in this case, all our morality would break down. In his every action, man would represent God to himself as a rewarder or avenger. This image would force itself involuntarily on his soul, and his hope for reward and fear of punishment would take the place of moral motives. Man would be virtuous out of sensuous impulses.⁶²

Towards the question of God's existence, therefore, Kant's attitude was complex. He considered it necessary to demonstrate the indemonstrability of God's existence so as to safeguard the possibility of moral goodness. At the same time, he felt compelled to establish the indemonstrability of God's non-existence so as to preserve the possibility of faith in God. He considered such faith equally necessary in order for moral goodness to be possible. His reasoning was that, in order for people to be able to act from respect for the moral law, it is necessary that they believe in a *summum bonum* or highest good in which perfect moral goodness is rewarded with the happiness it deserves. The attainment of perfect moral goodness requires immortality, for no one can become perfectly good during their lifetime. Perfect happiness as a reward for such goodness requires God to apportion it in accordance with desert. So, despite supposing God's existence to be incapable of being proved, Kant also supposed it was necessary for us to postulate God's existence, along with immortality and free will, so as to entertain the idea of the possibility of a *summum bonum* in which happiness is combined with moral perfection.

Notwithstanding how sincere Kant might have been in wanting to make way for faith, his critique of speculative theology has been generally thought to have had a profoundly destructive effect upon religious belief. His contemporary, Moses Mendelssohn, called Kant the *Alleszermalmer*, 'the one who smashes everything'. And, in terms of the destructive impact which his thought had upon religion, Heinrich Heine likened Kant to Robespierre. Heine wrote,

We find in both the same talent of mistrust, only ... the one exercises it against thoughts, and calls it criticism, while the other applies it against men, and entitles it republican virtue. ... One ... placed a king ... the other a God on the scale. ... Had the citizens of Königsberg divined the full meaning of this subversive, world-bruising thought they would have felt before that man a far more gruesome awe than before an executioner – an executioner who puts only men to death.⁶³

Again, Arthur Schopenhauer remarks of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that '[t]he detailed refutation of speculative theology ... is to a certain extent the aim and object of the whole work. ... [T]he complete overthrow of that philosophy through this polemic stands to Kant's immortal credit. He has eliminated theism from philosophy....'⁶⁴ Elsewhere, Schopenhauer describes Kant as having 'given the death-blow to speculative theology by criticism thereof'.⁶⁵

Notwithstanding how religiously inclined Hume and Kant might personally have been, their respective critiques of natural theology have served to undermine the credibility of theism in the eyes of later generations of philosophers. Either by first-hand acquaintance with the relevant texts themselves, or else, and more often, by hearsay, most philosophers today are convinced that, between them, Hume and Kant have decisively refuted all the traditional philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Against the background of such a presumption, small wonder is it that few present-day philosophers subscribe to the classical conception of philosophy. In the following two sections, I propose to examine the various objections which Hume and Kant levelled against the two arguments for the existence of God upon which the classical conception of philosophy has always been traditionally reliant. Following that, in the following and concluding section of the chapter, I shall subject to similar scrutiny such arguments as Nietzsche may be thought to have advanced against theism. In the case of all three thinkers, my aim is to show that none of their arguments provides good reason for rejecting these two arguments for the existence of God.

3.4 The assault on the Cosmological Argument

To what considerations did Hume and Kant each appeal in their repudiation of natural theology? In what follows, for reasons given above, I confine discussion to a consideration of their objections to the

Cosmological Argument and the Argument from Design. I shall consider each in turn. I shall rehearse each argument in the form in which Hume criticised it before presenting and considering the various objections raised against these arguments by Hume and Kant. In the case of each argument, my aim will be to show that none of their objections succeeds in establishing either argument to be unsound. This holds true for the Argument from Design even in the face of Darwin's theory of evolution.

The objections which Hume levels against the two arguments are chiefly contained in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In this work, Hume places the following succinct and lucid formulation of the Cosmological Argument into the mouth of Demea, one of the principal interlocutors in the dialogues:

Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; it being absolutely impossible for any thing to produce itself, or be the cause of its own existence. In mounting up, therefore, from effects to causes, we must either go on in tracing an infinite succession, without any ultimate cause at all; or must at last have recourse to some ultimate cause, that is *necessarily* existent: Now that the first supposition is absurd may be thus proved. In the infinite chain or succession of causes and effects, each single effect is determined to exist by the power and efficacy of that cause, which immediately preceded; but the whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by any thing: and yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason, as much as any particular object, which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable, why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession, or no succession at all. If there be no necessarily-existent being, any supposition, which can be formed, is equally possible; nor is there any more absurdity in Nothing's having existed from eternity, than there is in that succession of causes, which constitutes the universe. What was it then, which determined something to exist rather than nothing, and bestowed being on a particular possibility, exclusive of the rest? *External causes*, there are supposed to be none. Was it *Nothing*? But that can never produce any thing. We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily-existent Being, who carries the REASON of his existence in himself; and who cannot be supposed not to exist without an express contradiction. There is consequently such a Being, that is, there is a Deity.⁶⁶

For purposes of discussion, it will be convenient to represent the Cosmological Argument schematically as follows:

- (1) Everything that exists must have a cause or reason for existing.
- (2) Everything that exists must either exist necessarily in and of itself or not so exist.

Ergo, (3) Everything that exists must either exist necessarily in and of itself or else must have been caused to exist by something else, which either exists necessarily in and of itself or else was caused to exist by something else that either exists necessarily in and of itself or was caused to exist by something else that either exists necessarily in and of itself or ... etc. *ad infinitum*.

Ergo, (4) Unless the physical universe exists necessarily in and of itself, then it was either caused to exist by something which exists necessarily in and of itself, or else it is nothing but a beginningless series of physical continuants none of which exists necessarily in and of itself, each having been brought into being by some earlier member(s) in the series.

(5) If the physical universe is nothing but a beginningless series of physical continuants none of which exists necessarily in and of itself, each having been brought into being by some earlier member(s), then, the series of such continuants as a whole, and hence the physical universe, would lack a cause.

(1) and (5) together entail:

(6) The physical universe is not just a beginningless series of physical continuants none of which exists necessarily, each having been caused to exist by some earlier member(s) of that series.

(4) and (6) together entail:

(7) Unless the physical universe is something the existence of which is necessary in and of itself, then its existence has been caused by something which exists necessarily in and of itself.

(8) The physical universe is not something the existence of which is necessary in and of itself.

(7) and (8) together entail:

(9) The physical universe has been caused to exist by something which exists necessarily in and of itself.

Not a single independent premise of this argument escapes criticism from Hume. Against premise (1), Hume advances two objections. The first objection occurs in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, the second in his *Dialogues*. The objection Hume offers in the *Treatise* is that, even though, as a matter of fact, it might be true that everything that begins to exist has a cause, it is not necessary that this should be so. It is perfectly possible, because, according to Hume, it is perfectly conceivable, that a thing might start to exist quite spontaneously without anything having caused it to do so. For Hume, there is no inherent internal incoherence in the notion of something's starting to exist at some moment in time quite spontaneously, without anything having caused it to do so. Hume advances the objection in the following words:

As all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence is plainly possible for the imagination, and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible that it implies no contradiction or absurdity.⁶⁷

Against what Hume argues here, it may be questioned whether Hume is correct to claim us able to conceive of something's starting to exist without being caused to do so by anything, without some internal incoherence being involved in what we conceive. The difficulty with Hume's claim has been well put by John Haldane:

Try ... imagining for your self something popping into existence ... uncaused. You are sitting at an empty desk looking at its surface and all of a sudden a book, or an apple, or a lump of unidentifiable matter appears before you.... That is imaginable, but what is neither given nor required by the scenario is that the objects have come to be without a cause and that is not at all something one would suppose. Rather one would ask 'Where have they come from?' 'How did they get there?...', and so on.... [O]nce one moves from Hume's abstractions to an actual example it becomes clear that this invites questions in search of explanations by reference to antecedent causes. In short, to the extent that Hume's remarks lead

in any direction it is towards and not away from the principle of sufficient reason.⁶⁸

In his *Dialogues*, Hume offers somewhat different reasons for rejecting premise (1). Here, Hume suggests that it is possible that the universe is *eternal*, and hence that there was never a time at which it did not exist. Should the universe be eternal, argues Hume, its existence would not stand in need of a cause. Hence, for a somewhat different reason from that offered in the *Treatise*, not everything that exists would stand in need of a cause in order to exist. In the *Dialogues*, Philo is made to state this objection by asking rhetorically, 'How can any thing, that exists from eternity, have a cause, since that relation implies a priority in time and a beginning of existence?'⁶⁹

The force of this objection of Hume's to premise (1) depends on whether he is correct to suppose that causes must always have prior temporal existence to their effects. It may be doubted whether this must always be so. For example, each physical thing in the universe supposedly exerts upon every other physical thing some degree of gravitational attraction. In so doing, each thing supposedly exerts upon every other thing some form of causal influence, at least so far as concerns their relative locations. This form of mutual causal influence is something which things exert upon one another without their having, or indeed being able to have, any temporal priority *vis-à-vis* each other in any way.

Even were the physical universe eternal, and so, in consequence, there was never a time at which it did not exist, its being eternal would not necessarily obviate its need for a cause at every moment of existence. This is so, if, as seems to be the case, its existence is contingent. No matter how long the world might have existed, even if from eternity, if its existence is only contingent, it seems legitimate to wonder, with respect to the universe at each moment of its existence, *what* sustains it in existence at that moment, granted that its existence at that moment is not necessary. By way of response, it might be said that, granted that the universe exists from eternity, no explanation is needed to account for its existence at each and every moment. To such a response, it can be replied that, provided that the existence of the universe is contingent, there is as much need of an explanation of its existence at each and every moment of its existence, as there is to account for its coming into existence at some moment. Therefore, even if the universe has always existed, its existence at each moment of it still stands in need of causal explanation,

provided its existence is contingent and not necessary.

Hume rejects premise (2) by taking issue with the concept of something's existing necessarily in and of itself. Hume objects to this notion on the grounds that there is nothing of whose non-existence we are not able to form a notion without any internal inconsistency being contained in the notion of that thing's non-existence. Since, so he argues, the existence of a thing would only be necessary in and of itself, if the notion of its non-existence were to contain some inherent contradiction, it follows there is and could be nothing whose existence is necessary in and of itself. Hume states this objection so:

Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction.... [T]he mind [can] [n]ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in being; in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words, therefore, *necessary existence*, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent.⁷⁰

This objection of Hume's has force only if he is correct that the existence of something could be necessary in and of itself, only if the thought of that thing's non-existence were to involve some internal contradiction. This, however, is open to doubt. To suppose that, unlike the physical universe, God exists necessarily in and of Himself is not to suppose that the notion of God's non-existence contains, or, by itself, entails, a formal contradiction. Rather, it is only to suppose that, in the words of John Haldane whose view we follow here, God 'exists eternally, ... does not owe [His] being to anything else and ... cannot not exist'.⁷¹ Clearly, it is possible for us to conceive that no such Being exists, without any contradiction being involved in our conception. Our being able to do this does not show that it is not possible that there could be a Being who satisfies this description. It is only a Being who answers this latter description that the Cosmological Argument is designed to establish the existence of. It is not intended to establish it to be intrinsically necessary that such a Being exists.

Hume questions the legitimacy of the inference of premise (4) from premise (3) on the basis of two other claims he makes. First, he denies

the physical universe as a whole to be an instance of any kind of which there can be more than one instance. Second, he asserts that only non-unique particulars admit of standing as the terms of causal relations, either as causes or effects. Hume takes the first of these two claims to be self-evident. He derives the second from his account of what is involved in one thing's being the cause or effect of some other thing(s). All that is involved, he argues, is for the first thing to be an instance of a kind each of whose instances is spatially or temporally adjacent to some instance of another kind. Given this, argues Hume, because the physical universe is singular and unique, it is not something whose existence admits of being conceived as an effect, and hence as standing in need of a causal explanation.

Hume can correctly deny the validity of the inference of premise (4) from premise (3), only if he is correct in both his claims. Their conjunction seems singularly implausible.⁷² By tracing the origin of the physical universe to a supposed 'Big Bang', modern cosmology places Hume in the following dilemma. Either, he must deny that the physical universe as a whole is singular and unique, on the grounds that it resembles other things besides it that explode, such as grenades. Or, alternatively, should he insist on the uniqueness of the physical universe, he must concede that there are some unique things which are capable of standing as terms of causal relations.

Hume's denies premise (5) on the grounds that the cause of the existence of any series of physical continuants is nothing beyond the sum of the causes of each member of the series. Accordingly, so he argues, should each individual non-necessary physical entity have been caused to exist by some previously existing but non-necessary member(s) of a beginningless series of such non-necessary existents, then the physical universe as a whole will *not* be without a cause. Hume writes, 'Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable, should you afterwards ask me, what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the cause of the parts.'⁷³

Hume's objection has force only if he is correct to suppose that the parts of any whole none of which exist necessarily in and of themselves can each and all be fully explained in terms of other members of that same whole. This supposition may be doubted. The causal explanations of the parts of any such whole in terms of other parts cannot add up to a causal explanation of the whole, if the items mentioned as causes are items whose own existence stands in need of

a causal explanation. The fatal flaw in Hume's supposition has been well put by James Sadowsky. He asks,

how any member [of any such causal series] can do any causing unless it first exists. B cannot cause A until D brings it into existence. What is true of D is equally true of E and F without end. Since each condition for the existence of A requires the fulfilment of a prior condition, it follows that none of them can ever be fulfilled. In each case what is offered as part of the solution turns out instead to be part of the problem.⁷⁴

We are left with Hume's objection to premise (8). Hume rejected this premise on the somewhat incongruous grounds, given his reasons for denying premise (2), that the physical universe might possibly be necessary in and of itself, despite human beings not being able to perceive the necessity of its existence. In support of such a possibility, Hume appeals to the fact that, in arithmetic, there are certain propositions which we can know are possibly true without our being able to perceive their necessity and despite them being necessary, if true. As an example of such an arithmetic proposition, Hume cites that which asserts the sum of the constituent integers of each product of the number 9 always to add up to 9 or else to some other number whose constituent integers add up to 9. (Thus, $2 \times 9 = 18$ [$=1+8=9$]; $3 \times 9 = 27$ [$=2+7=9$]; $4 \times 9 = 36$ [$=3+6=9$]; and so on.) Hume observes that those proficient in mathematics might be able to demonstrate the truth of this proposition, and hence become able to apprehend its necessity. Others might simply be aware that it is possibly, or even probably true, without appreciating or being able to appreciate that, or why, it could not be otherwise and despite it not being able to be otherwise. Likewise, so Hume argues, the universe could appear to human beings to be something whose existence is merely contingent, despite its existence being necessary. Hume asks,

Is it not probable ... that the whole economy of the universe is conducted by a ... necessity, though no human algebra can furnish a key ...? [M]ay it not happen, that, could we penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies, we should clearly see why it was absolutely impossible, they could ever admit of any other disposition.⁷⁵

Hume's objection to premise (8) suffers from the following fatal weak-

ness. It is possible, given the natures of physical things, that they could not but exist and possess the various properties they do. Despite this, their existence and their properties could not be supposed necessary unless it was necessary that they existed with the natures that they had. The natures of physical things can only render their existence necessary after they existed with those natures. Hence, the natures of physical things cannot, as Hume suggests here, be supposed capable of rendering the existence of the things that have these natures necessary.

We turn now to Kant's objections to the Cosmological Argument. These are contained in a section of his *Critique of Pure Reason* entitled, 'The Dialectical Inferences of Pure Reason'. Here, Kant takes issue with the argument on no less than three separate counts. Utilising that schematised form of the argument we set out earlier, we may say that Kant rejects premises (1), (2) and (8).

Premise (1), it will be recalled, asserts that everything that exists at any time must have a cause or reason for existing. Kant rejects this premise on the seemingly dubious grounds that all that we can think of as having causes are the various changes of state which are undergone by any physical substances at various moments of time, not their coming into existence at specific moments of time. 'Knowledge of nature ... refers to a cause, not the things themselves (substances), but only that which *happens*, that is, their *states*.'⁷⁶

Kant's grounds for rejecting premise (1) seem weak. *Pace* Kant, innumerable physical substances seem to begin to exist at specific times. Moreover, for each such substance, it seems we can enquire after, and often succeed in identifying, the causes of its beginning to exist when it does. Kant's grounds for rejecting premise (1) seem less weak when it is appreciated that the physical substances of whose existence Kant denies we can and do seek or find the causes are not everyday physical objects, like chairs, mountains or planets. They are, rather, the ultimate particles, whatever they be, out of which everyday physical objects are composed and which are conserved throughout all substantival change. Kant argued that it is necessary for us to posit the permanency of such physical substances in order for us to be able to construe our sensory experience as the appearances of a single common spatio-temporal universe. Kant calls this type of argument for a category or principle, a 'transcendental deduction' of it. By this, he means a demonstration of our need to adopt this category or principle in all our thinking about the world. In the case at hand, the principle to which he claims we are obliged to subscribe is that which

he calls *the principle of permanence of substance*. This states that '[i]n all changes of appearances substance is permanent; its quantum in nature is neither increased nor decreased'.⁷⁷ Kant argues that, were any such substance to be supposed capable of coming into existence or going out of existence, then our experience could not have the unity it does as the experience of a single common world.⁷⁸ Furthermore, argues Kant, there could never have been a time when such a substance began to exist. This is because, for there to have been such a time, it would have been necessary that there be a time before any such substance existed. However, so argues Kant, it is impossible for there to have been any such time, since we can only conceive of the lapse of time in terms of changes which physical things have undergone, all of which changes presuppose the existence of physical substance.⁷⁹

Defenders of the Cosmological Argument are not without ways of replying to Kant. They can respond that, even if physical substance has always existed and would always continue to do so, its existence would still only be contingent and not necessary in itself. Therefore, it would remain legitimate to seek for a cause of its existence. Should this be so, Kant would not have provided any reason to reject premise (1), even should he be correct in what he asserts about the conservation of matter.

The second premise of the Cosmological Argument, to recall, was that everything that exists must either do so necessarily in and of itself or not so exist. Kant rejects this premise on much the same grounds as did Hume. He denies, that is, that it makes sense to suppose anything capable of existing necessarily in and of itself. 'There is nothing which absolutely binds Reason to accept such an existence; on the contrary it can always annihilate it in thought, without contradiction; absolute necessity is a necessity that is to be found in thought alone.'⁸⁰ Kant may well be correct to assert, as he does here, that there is nothing of whose existence we may form an idea of whose non-existence we can equally form the idea without any internal incoherence being involved in our notion of that thing's non-existence. This applies even to something conceived of as incapable of not having existed. That is, we can without internal contradiction being involved conceive of there being no such thing. However, it does not follow from this that there is no internal incoherence in our notion of the non-existence of a thing with such a status when such a notion is combined with the notion of the contingency of the physical universe and the necessity for there to be something capable of accounting for

the existence of the physical world. If all contingent existence requires a cause, then, ultimately, only the existence of something that is not itself contingent is able to serve as such a cause. Hence, the notion of the non-existence of a necessary being *will* involve an internal incoherence when it is combined with the notion of the existence of a contingently existing physical existence which stands in need of an explanation in terms of something that is not itself contingent. Consequently, Kant may be thought not to have supplied any valid reason for denying premise (2), in the sense in which it is needed for the remainder of the argument to go through.

Even were he to have accepted premises (1) and (2) of the Cosmological Argument, Kant would still resist the conclusion of the argument because he takes issue with premise (8). This premise, to recall, denies the physical universe to be something whose existence is necessary in and of itself. Kant rejects this premise on the grounds that we cannot know that the existence of physical substance is not necessary in and of itself. He writes, 'That substance (matter) is itself contingent in its existence would have to be known in a purely speculative [or a priori] manner.... Now I maintain that all attempts to employ Reason in theology in any merely speculative manner are altogether fruitless and by their very nature null and void.'⁸¹ It is curious that Kant makes this claim, given that, as we have just seen, he challenges the notion of necessary existence on the grounds of there being nothing the non-existence of which we are not capable of conceiving without contradiction. However, Kant's assertion that, for all we can know, the existence of physical substance might be necessary is no stray or idle one. Kant advances a considered argument for the assertion when commenting upon and criticising the Cosmological Argument. The relevant passage runs:

In the strict meaning of the category, the contingent is so named because its contradictory opposite is possible. Now we cannot argue from empirical contingency to intelligible contingency. When anything is altered, the opposite of its state is actual at another time, and is therefore possible. This present state is not, however, the contradictory opposite of the preceding state. To obtain such a contradictory opposite we require to conceive, that in the same time in which the preceding state was, its opposite could have existed in its place, and this can never be inferred from [the fact of] the alteration.... Accordingly the succession of opposite determinations, that is, the alteration, in no way establishes contingency

of the type represented in the concepts of pure understanding; and cannot therefore carry us to the existence of a necessary being. Alteration proves only empirical contingency; that is, that the new state, in the absence of a cause which belongs to the preceding time, could never of itself have taken place. This cause, even if it be viewed as absolutely necessary, must be such as can be thus met with in time, and must belong to the series of appearances.⁸²

The sense of this passage is not exactly transparent. However, what Kant here seems to be arguing is that, just because each state of each physical substance is contingent, we must not suppose the existence of physical substance itself to be contingent. For physical substance persists through all changes of physical state. Therefore, the contingency of the various states of physical substance does not establish its existence to be contingent.

Ingenious though Kant's argument is, it gives us little reason to suppose that the existence of physical substance might itself be necessary in and of itself. Granted we are able to form a clear and distinct notion of the non-existence of the physical universe, it seems Kant has provided us with no good reason for supposing the existence of the physical universe to be anything other than contingent. Accordingly, Kant's objections to the Cosmological Argument may be judged to offer no more reason for supposing it unsound than do Hume's. We proceed next to a consideration of their objections to the Argument from Design.

3.5 The assault on the Argument from Design

Hume places the following eloquent formulation of this argument in his *Dialogues* in the mouth of Cleanthes. He invites his sceptical interlocutor, Philo, to

Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to end, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions

of human contrivance; of human designs, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed. . . . By this argument . . . , do we prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.⁸³

We may schematically represent the Argument from Design as follows:

(1) Each living organism, together with the universe which they all inhabit, resembles some machine or other human artefact more closely than it resembles anything not deliberately designed through displaying some degree of adaptation to the well-being of some creature(s): their own well-being in the case of each organism; that of humans, in the case of machines and other artefacts, and that of all living organisms, in the case of the universe.

(2) In proportion as different things resemble each other, so is it likely that their causes will also resemble each other.

Ergo, (3) Whatever is the cause of living organisms and the physical universe that they all inhabit is likely to resemble whatever is the cause of machines and artefacts.

(4) The cause of machines and artefacts is human intelligence.

Ergo, (5) It is likely that the cause of living organisms and the physical universe that they all inhabit is some form of non-human intelligence.

Ergo, (6) It is likely that some non-human intelligence exists which created the physical universe and the living organisms that inhabit it.

As the Argument from Design has been here set out, Hume takes issue with both its first and second premises. Against the first premise, Hume advances two separate objections. Hume's first objection is this. With our own solar system firmly in mind, Hume argues that, however conducive it might be to the well-being of the life-forms that it sustains, it bears less of a resemblance to some machine or other artefact than it does to some animal or, still more so, to some vegetable. Since no animal or vegetable has come into existence

through intelligent design and deliberate creation, there is no reason to suppose the universe has. This is notwithstanding its degree of adaptation to the well-being of organisms which inhabit it. Hume states the objection when he has Philo reply to Cleanthes as follows:

[I]f we survey the universe ..., it bears a great resemblance to an animal or organized body, and seems actuated with a like principle of life and motion. A continual circulation of matter in it ...: a continual waste in every part is incessantly repaired: the closest sympathy is perceived throughout the entire system: and each part or member ... operates both to its own preservation and to that of the whole. ... [I]t must be confessed, that ... the universe resembles more a human body than it does the works of human art and contrivance. ... [Y]et is the analogy also defective in many circumstances ...: no organs of sense; no seat of thought or reason; no one precise origin of motion and action. In short, it seems to bear a stronger resemblance to a vegetable than to an animal.⁸⁴

Hume proceeds to argue that, because the physical universe resembles an animal or vegetable more than it does a machine or other artefact, it is more likely that its cause will resemble the causes of animals and plants in *not* being intelligent than it is that it will resemble the causes of machines and artefacts in being such. Hume writes, 'If the universe bears a greater likeness to animal bodies and to vegetables, than to the works of human art, it is more probable, that its cause resembles the cause of the former than that of the latter, and its origin ought rather to be ascribed to generation or vegetation than to reason or design.'⁸⁵

Hume's argument seems weak. Hume's claim is that the physical universe – more specifically, our solar system – bears a closer resemblance to some animal or a vegetable than it does some machine or other artefact. The claim is unconvincing.⁸⁶ In its manifest workings, the physical universe in general, and our own solar system in particular, exhibits a degree of regularity and predictability that far exceeds that which is exhibited by any animal or vegetable. After all, it is by the sun that we set our clocks and not by the comings and goings of sun-flowers or salamanders! That this is so suggests that the physical universe more closely resembles some regular and predictable machine or artefact, for example a clock, than it does any far less regular and predictable animal or vegetable.

Hume's second objection to premise (1) is a variant of the time-honoured *prima facie* obstacle to the reasonableness of theistic belief

posed by the existence of natural evil. Hume claims that our world generates and contains far more in the way of gratuitous natural evil than can be supposed consistent with its being the creation of some benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient intelligence. The physical universe and the living creatures in it are far less well adapted to the well-being of these creatures, even just the human ones, than machines are for achieving the ends for which they have been built.

Look round this universe. What an immense profusion of beings, animated and organized, sensible and active! . . . But inspect a little more narrowly these living existences. . . . How hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them for their own happiness! . . . The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind Nature, impregnated by a great vivifying principle, and pouring forth from her lap, without discernment or parental care, her maimed and abortive children!⁸⁷

Hume concludes, 'The course of nature tends not to human or animal felicity: therefore it is not established for that purpose.'⁸⁸

Hume identifies four different ways in which the quantity of suffering which living creatures endure exceeds that which, he claims, might have been expected were they and the physical universe to have been created for the purpose of their enjoying well-being. Of these four ways, Hume observes, '[n]one of them appear to human reason, in the least degree, necessary or unavoidable; nor can we suppose them such, without the utmost license of imagination'.⁸⁹ First, animals and humans are susceptible to pain, not just to pleasure. Their susceptibility to pain is said to be unnecessary and gratuitous. To all appearances, a susceptibility to pleasure might seemingly have sufficed to equip living beings with all the psychological inducements they needed to ensure that they performed all the actions necessary for their self-preservation and reproduction. Second, the pain that animals and humans suffer results from the course of nature proceeding in a uniform and regular way. Should nature be the creation of a benevolent and omnipotent designer, we might have expected its course to display far less regularity than it does, as its creator intervened with its workings so to 'exterminate all ill, where-ever it were to be found; and produce all good, without any preparation or long progress of causes and effects'.⁹⁰ Third, were animals and humans to have been created by some benevolent intelligence, their native powers and faculties might have been expected to be far more

conducive to their felicity than in fact they are.

Nature seems to have formed an exact calculation of the necessities of her creatures; and like a *rigid master*, has afforded them little more powers or endowments, than what are strictly sufficient to supply those necessities. An *indulgent parent* would have bestowed a large stock, in order to guard against accidents, and secure the happiness and welfare of the creature, in the most unfortunate concurrence of circumstances. Every course of life would not have been so surrounded with precipices, that the least departure from the true path, by mistake or necessity, must involve us in misery and ruin.⁹¹

Finally, the course of nature contains far more by way of natural disasters and biological monstrosities than we should have expected were the world the result of intelligent and benevolent design.

Rains are necessary to nourish all the plants and animals of the earth but how often are they defective? how often excessive? ... There is nothing so advantageous in the universe, but what frequently becomes pernicious, by its excess or defect; nor has Nature guarded, with the requisite accuracy, against all disorder or confusion. The irregularity is never, perhaps, so great as to destroy any species; but is often sufficient to involve the individuals in ruin and misery.⁹²

In maintaining all or any part of the natural evil that our world contains to be gratuitous, Hume may be accused of having begged the question. An instance of natural evil may be supposed to be gratuitous, only if it might not have occurred without some greater evil having had to occur in its place, and without the loss of any good, of which that evil is the necessary condition, the occurrence of which is preferable, despite the evil which is its necessary condition, to the non-occurrence of that good and of all the evils which are necessary for it. Judged by reference to this criterion, none of the considerations which Hume cites establishes any or all of the natural evil which occurs in the world to be gratuitous.

The first such consideration, it will be recalled, is that living creatures might have been so created as to have only been susceptible to pleasure, not to pain as well. One might well wonder how, in such circumstances, creatures might have been induced to avoid performing

injurious acts, such as putting their paws or hands into fires or ingesting injurious and poisonous substances.

In reply, it might be suggested, and this is Hume's second consideration, that a benevolent, omnipotent and omniscient creator might have been expected to intervene directly with the course of nature so as to prevent all harm befalling his creatures, as well as directly to supply them with all the goods they needed or might desire. Hume invites us to suppose that a benevolent creator might have been expected to shepherd his creatures away from all contact with any dangerous objects or else to remove these objects from their paths in time to spare them injury, as well as to supply them directly with what they needed, instead of only supplying a lawful system of nature through which they must learn to navigate to satisfy their needs. Such a high degree of divine intervention as Hume is here inviting us to envisage, however, could not take place without many goods having to be forfeited whose forfeiture, arguably, would be worse than the natural evils that are their necessary conditions. Not least of these goods is the orderliness and regularity of nature. Without it, human beings might not have been as easily led to acquire such knowledge of God's existence and nature as facilitates their being able to engage in the loving contemplation of God. To such a claim, it might be replied that humans might have been created with an innate knowledge of God's existence and nature sufficient to enable them to experience the joys of *theoria* without first having to acquire *sophia* through engaging in *philosophy*. However, for human beings to have been created so would have deprived them of the undoubted joy that accompanies their *discovery* of the truth through their own reflection. Arguably, such a joy more than compensates for the natural evil that is a necessary condition of their being able to enjoy such a good.

The third consideration which Hume proffers in support of his claim that (at least some of) the natural evil in the world is gratuitous is that, were the universe the handiwork of some benevolent intelligence, its inhabitants might have been expected to be better provisioned than they are with the wherewithal for their enjoying felicity. Again, Hume fails to supply adequate reason for supposing this to be so. For example, were sheep better able to evade the fox, then foxes would have been less well able to survive and flourish. Should it be suggested that the world would have been a better place had sheep been allowed to graze without any predators, we might wonder whether they might not then have reproduced beyond the point at which pastures might have been able to sustain them, ... and so on.

The fourth consideration which Hume adduces in support of the gratuitousness of at least some of the natural evil in the world is that more natural disasters and individual misfortune and tragedy occur than we should expect were the world the product of benevolent design. Against Hume's claim, it can only be reiterated that, assuming it be desirable for the world to possess such order as sustains the variety of life-forms it does, there is no reason to suppose the world might have been differently ordered so as to provide any greater scope for felicity than it does. As John Haldane has argued,

In general there cannot be a world of living things developing in accord with their inbuilt teleologies – growing, moving, sensing, reproducing and so on – without interactions that are to the detriment of some individuals and species. ... Beings possessed of more and greater powers have open to them higher forms of self-realisation. By this very fact, however, they are vulnerable to more and greater losses. ... Those who have more, have more to lose. The death of a human being thus constitutes a greater loss than does the death of a rabbit or tree. ... To have created [such] a world ... is to have made something good, notwithstanding that it is a place of loss.⁹³

We turn next to Hume's objections to premise (2) of the Argument from Design. To recall, this premise asserts that, in proportion as things resemble each other, so it is likely that their causes will resemble one another. Hume rejects this premise on the grounds that, even if living creatures and the physical universe bear to machines and other artefacts some degree of resemblance in being conducive to the well-being of organisms, there is no reason to suppose that the former have been created by a single omnipotent, omniscient, immaterial intelligence, such as God is taken to be. Hume claims that there are several alternative possible explanations for their possessing a degree of conduciveness to well-being each of which is as likely as their having been designed by God. First, the life-sustaining order of the physical universe and of the living creatures which inhabit it might have been created by more than one intelligence acting in consort.⁹⁴ Second, the intelligence or intelligences responsible for the life-sustaining order of the universe and its creatures might have been embodied, rather than immaterial.⁹⁵ Finally, the life-sustaining order of the universe and the living creatures this order sustains might have been brought into existence without having been designed by any

form or forms of intelligence whatsoever. Philo puts the last point so:

A tree bestows order and organization on that tree, which springs from it, without knowing the order; an animal, in the same manner, on its offspring; a bird, on its nest. . . . To say, that all this order in animals and vegetables proceeds ultimately from design, is begging the question; nor can that great point be ascertained otherwise than by proving *a priori*, . . . that order . . . , from its nature, . . . can never, of itself, or from original unknown principles, belong to matter.⁹⁶

Philo goes on:

[f]or ought we can know *a priori*, matter may contain the source or spring of order originally, within itself . . . ; and there is no more difficulty in conceiving, that the several elements, from an internal unknown cause, may fall into the most exquisite arrangement, than to conceive that their ideas, in the great, universal mind, from a like internal, unknown cause, fall into that arrangement.⁹⁷

We can afford to be brief in considering the first two of the three possible explanations of the world which Hume offers as alternatives to its creation by a single intelligent and benevolent designer. If the physical universe is the product of intelligent design, rather than being a pure accident, it is more likely to be the handiwork of only one rather than more than one intelligence. This is so for two broad reasons. The first reason is the need for theoretical parsimony. In the absence of any evidence for supposing the universe to be the handiwork of more than one intelligence rather than only one, then, faced with a choice between supposing it the handiwork of one or of more than one intelligent designer, we should choose to suppose it to be the creation of only one. For it is not necessary to postulate more than one to account for the phenomena in question. The second reason for preferring the hypothesis of there being only one designer of the universe to supposing more than one is that the general harmony and uniformity of everything in the universe suggest that, should it be the product of design, it is more likely to be the handiwork of a single designer, rather than a plurality of designers who might have been expected to have left in their joint product some trace of their plural individualities.

Hume's strongest challenge to premise (2) derives from his suggestion that it is as likely that the degree of adaptation displayed by living

creatures and the physical universe results from blind natural necessity as from intelligent design. Today, Charles Darwin is widely supposed to have supplied the wherewithal for an explanation of the vastly diverse range of living species which dispenses with the need to suppose that either they or the physical universe they inhabit have been designed. Very crudely, the so-called, but misleadingly named, process known as 'random variation' is supposed to be capable of explaining how biologically diverse organisms could have emerged from a common stock. Likewise, natural selection is supposed to be able to explain how only such variants from this common stock as are able to find for themselves a suitable ecological niche can survive and reproduce their kind successfully. To confirm Hume's conjecture that it is possible for life to have grown up in all its present diversity without need of design, all that this story need be supplemented by is the further conjecture, which many life-scientists are more than happy to make,⁹⁸ that, in the course of the earth's cooling at some point early in its history, the earliest living matter 'emerged' quite fortuitously, without benefit of any design. In the face of the apparent plausibility of such a narrative, small wonder is it that so many today are prepared to agree with Richard Dawkins that Darwin's theory has effectively destroyed the plausibility of theism. Dawkins speaks for many when he writes, 'although atheism might have been *logically* tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist. . . . Natural selection, the blind, unconscious, automatic process which Darwin discovered . . . we now know is the explanation for the existence and apparently purposeful form of all life.'⁹⁹

How compelling is the preceding narrative as a materialist explanation of the variety of life-forms that exists today in which the need is entirely dispensed with for having to appeal to design at any part of the story? Is it equally as likely as, more likely, or less likely than an explanation of their existence in terms of design? Many today regard the above explanation as a much more likely explanation than design. They believe we have reason to prefer it over the hypothesis of design for much the same reason as, should we be obliged to explain the world in terms of intelligent design, we would have reason to prefer to postulate only one rather more than one designer. That reason is theoretical economy. We know the physical universe exists and that its constituents possess such basic properties as we know them to. If the basic properties of physical things are sufficient to account for the existence of living beings in all their manifold variety, then it would

be otiose to invoke intelligent design to account for their existence – or so it has seemed to many.

The materialistic explanation of life, however, may be challenged on two counts. First, the narrative may be deemed to contain certain crucial 'gaps' which do not seem, even in principle, capable of being filled within a purely materialistic framework. There are three varieties of biological phenomena for which, arguably, no materialistic narrative of the sort given above can account.¹⁰⁰ The first is the very first emergence of living matter from non-living matter. In being alive, living matter possesses a *teleological* organisation that is wholly absent from everything that preceded it. Second, there is the emergence, from the very earliest life-forms which were incapable of reproducing themselves, of those life-forms with the capacity of reproducing themselves. Without the existence of such a capacity, it would not have been possible for different species to emerge through random mutation and natural selection. Accordingly, such mechanisms cannot be invoked in any explanation of how life-forms with this capacity first 'evolved' from those that lacked it. Third, there can be no materialistic explanation for the emergence of that species whose members engage in symbolic or conceptual thought – that is, *Homo sapiens*. If, as seems the case, human beings can only form concepts through acquiring some initial stock from beings who are previously in possession of them, it follows that the emergence of the very first concept-using members of the human species cannot be accounted for in terms of their evolution from any other natural species which may have preceded them. All three sets of biological phenomena, therefore, provide us with reason for doubting that it is possible to account for existent life-forms in purely materialistic terms and without recourse to design.

Even in the absence of any gaps in the narrative, the question still arises why a life-generating and life-sustaining universe should have existed in the first place rather than any one of the innumerably other seemingly no less logically possible physical universes which, had they existed, would not have been able to generate and sustain life as ours has. In the face of the apparent multiplicity of such other equally logically possible universes, we must say one or other of two things. Either we must assert with the materialists that the existence of the physical universe with its life-sustaining form is a matter of pure chance. Or else we must say with the theist that the existence of our universe is not accidental but was deliberately brought into being with the life-generating potential it had by an intelligence for the sake of

the life-forms which would come into being as a result of its having this initial form. It seems far less likely that, were the universe not the result of design, a universe such as ours with its life-generating and sustaining capacities should have come about than any one of the innumerable other possible universes which are not capable of sustaining life. Conversely, were God to exist, it seems more likely that a universe capable of generating life would have been brought into existence than any universe that was not capable of sustaining life. Therefore, given the existence of our universe, with its myriad life-forms, it seems more reasonable to suppose it the creation of some benevolent intelligence than to suppose it is purely accidental.¹⁰¹

None of Hume's various objections to the Argument from Design appears to succeed in casting any doubt on its validity, even when supplemented by considerations drawn from Darwin's theory of evolution. We must now consider whether Kant succeeds any better than Hume in refuting the argument. We can afford to deal briefly with Kant's objections to the Argument from Design. This is because Kant is prepared to concede that the argument can be thought to establish the existence of an intelligent designer or architect of the universe. All that Kant wished to deny of the argument is that, without its being supplemented by the Cosmological Argument, it can establish the existence of a divine creator of the universe. 'The utmost ... that the argument can prove is an *architect* of the world ... , not a *creator* of the world. ... This, however, is altogether inadequate to the lofty purpose which we have before our eyes, namely, the proof of an all-sufficient primordial being.'¹⁰²

In response to Kant's comment, we may remark that no one ever intended the Argument from Design to establish the existence of anything beyond some intelligent designer of the physical universe and the living beings who inhabit it. Therefore, if, as we have argued, the Cosmological Argument is sound, there is no reason for supposing that the designer of the world whose existence is established by the Argument from Design is not the necessary Being whose existence is established by the Cosmological Argument. Consequently, Kant's objections no more than Hume's give us reason to doubt the soundness of the argument.

3.6 God's jubilant obituarist

Nietzsche was far less sympathetic to the classical conception of philosophy than Hume and Kant were. Nietzsche discussed the

conception in at least very general terms on several occasions. Each time, he is at pains to maintain that behind it lie various forms of moral pathology. He portrays the conception as symptomatic of a defective or descending vitality and a refuge for those with insufficient vitality and spirit to be able to enjoy life on its own terms. For example, in the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche asks rhetorically,

[H]as not ... the claim that they possessed *wisdom* ... which has been made here and there ... by philosophers, the maddest and most immodest of all claims – has it not always been ... a *screen above all* ... behind which the philosopher saves himself because he has become weary, old, cold, hard ..., a screen behind which the philosopher hides from ... spirit?¹⁰³

For Nietzsche, to conceive of philosophy as a quest for a form of wisdom exercised in the activity of *theoria* is the coping response of previously powerful individuals who are faced with the decline of their own powers. Of someone in such a condition, Nietzsche remarks:

If he feels weary or ill or melancholy or satiated and as a consequence for the time being devoid of desires and wishes, ... he becomes thinker and prophet.... [B]ut ... all the products of his thinking are bound to reflect the condition he is in, which is one in which fear and weariness are on the increase and his valuation of action and active enjoyment on the decrease.... Later on, all those ... in this condition, ... and whose lives were melancholy ... came to be called ... thinkers or priests or medicine-men.... In this muffled shape, in this ambiguous guise, with an evil heart and often an anguished head, did contemplation first appear on earth.¹⁰⁴

Nietzsche claims that the only reason that contemplation came to be held in such high regard by proponents of the classical conception was because their own declining vitality had deprived them of all other more worldly sources of satisfaction. He writes,

To revel in pallid images of words and things, to sport with such invisible, inaudible, impalpable beings was, out of contempt for the sensorily tangible.... world, felt as a life in another *higher* world.... It is not the content of these sportings of spirituality, it is they

themselves which constituted 'the higher life' in the prehistoric ages of science.... The thinker needs ... self-uplifting, ... desensualization, ... the impersonal mode of thinking, contemplativeness.... [A]ll these means to knowledge ... bestowed on their inventors that feeling of happiness which appears in the human soul when it catches sight of a *final* goal.¹⁰⁵

In later works, Nietzsche is more explicit in his assessment of Plato and other proponents of the classical conception of philosophy. In *Twilight of the Idols*, he writes, 'The irreverent notion that the great sages are *declining types* first dawned on me in regard to just the case in which learned and unlearned prejudice is most strongly opposed to it: I recognised Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decay, as agents of the dissolution of Greece.'¹⁰⁶ Of Plato, he later writes, 'Ultimately my mistrust of Plato extends to the very bottom of him: I find him deviated ... from all the fundamental instincts of the Hellenes.... Greek philosophy [i]s the *decadence* of the Greek instinct.'¹⁰⁷ Passages such as these reveal just how much less sympathetic Nietzsche was to the classical conception of philosophy than even such ultimate critics of it as Hume.

Nietzsche's attitude here was clearly coloured by the militancy of his atheism. It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that Nietzsche considered it his life's mission to wage war against belief in God, especially in its Christian form. This war was conducted by Nietzsche in the name of an elect higher form of humanity of which Nietzsche considered himself the harbinger. In the opening aphorism of Book Five of his *Gay Science*, Nietzsche explains why the idea of God's non-existence induces such euphoria in him:

The greatest recent event – that 'God is dead', that the belief in the Christian god has become unbelievable – is already beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe.... [A] long plenitude and sequence of breakdown, destruction, ruin, and cataclysm ... is now impending.... [W]e look forward to the approaching gloom ... without any worry and fear for *ourselves*... [because] ... the consequences for *ourselves*, are quite the opposite of what we might perhaps expect: they are ... not at all sad and gloomy but rather like a new and scarcely describable kind of light, happiness, exhilaration, encouragement, dawn. Indeed, we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, when we hear the news that 'the old god is dead', as if a new dawn shone on us; our heart overflows with gratitude,

amazement, premonitions, expectation. At long last the horizon appears free to us again, even if it should not be bright; at long last our ships may venture out again, venture to face any danger; all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea'.¹⁰⁸

Notwithstanding the uncanny prescience with which Nietzsche here predicted that a general conflagration would engulf Europe once the death of God became generally known, Nietzsche portrays the demise of God as an occasion for joy among the cadre of like-minded intellectuals and artists such as himself. This is because the death of God will give them free scope for thought and artistic endeavour unencumbered by the theologically riven moral constraints under which they have laboured for so long.

Nietzsche found cause to celebrate the death of God, not just, or even primarily, because he thought man would thereby become free from an intellectual error. For Nietzsche, the very notion that there is a knowable objective truth was, as much as the belief in God's existence, among the errors from which he hoped to liberate the elite audience of kindred spirits to whom his writings are always exclusively addressed. Nietzsche celebrated the death of God because he considered belief in such a Being, together with the morality or systems of morality invariably associated with such belief, to be profoundly enervating. This was especially so in the case of Christianity.

Nietzsche called his book, *Twilight of the Idols*, a 'grand declaration of war' against all those 'eternal idols' in which people continue to believe and which 'are not, in the most eminent case, called idols'.¹⁰⁹ Among such idols, Nietzsche gives pride of place to God. The opening set of aphorisms includes the clearly rhetorical question, 'Which is it? Is man only God's mistake or God only man's mistake?'¹¹⁰ Later on, lest the reader be left in any doubt where Nietzsche stands on these questions, he makes his own answer pellucidly clear.

What alone can *our* teaching be? – That no one *gives* a human being his qualities.... He is *not* the result of a special design, a will, a purpose; he is *not* the subject of an attempt to attain to an 'ideal of man' or an 'ideal of happiness'.... [*T*]his alone is the great liberation – thus alone is the *innocence* of becoming restored.... The concept 'God' has hitherto been the greatest *objection* to existence.... We

deny God, we deny accountability: only by doing *that* do we redeem the world.¹¹¹

Nietzsche elaborates on this theme in *Ecce Homo*, the final work before his untimely descent into madness. There, he writes:

My task [has been] to prepare a moment of supreme coming-to-onself on the part of mankind, ... when it steps out from the dominion of chance and the priesthood and poses the question why? To what end? for the first time. ... This task follows of necessity from the insight that mankind is *not* of itself on the right path, that it is absolutely *not* divinely directed, that under precisely its holiest value-concepts rather the instinct of denial, of decay, the *decadence* instinct has seductively ruled. ... The physiologist demands *excision* of the degenerate part. ... What is the purpose of those lying concepts ... of morality 'soul', 'spirit', 'free will', 'God', if it is not the physiological ruin of mankind? ... When one directs seriousness away from self-preservation, enhancement of bodily strength, when one makes of greensickness an ideal, of contempt for the body 'salvation of soul' what else is it but a *recipe for decadence*?¹¹²

Nietzsche concludes this work by reiterating his hostility towards belief in God and towards the morality associated with such belief. 'Have I been understood?', he asks. '... The concept 'God' [has been] invented as the antithetical concept of life – everything harmful, noxious, slanderous, the whole mortal enmity against life brought into one terrible unity!'¹¹³

Although arrived at by entirely different routes from that taken by Nietzsche, and although motivated by decidedly different ethical aspirations from him as well as from each other, Marx and Freud both display towards belief in God an antipathy no less marked than Nietzsche's. All three thinkers portray such belief as pathological in some way, tracing its origin and tenacity to disreputable passions of one sort or another. All three thinkers take it for granted that all the arguments for God's existence had been previously so conclusively refuted as no longer to be worthy of serious consideration. So far as each was concerned, all that remains of interest in connection with religious belief is to explain how it could survive the demonstration of its groundlessness. The joint but independent verdict delivered by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud on religious belief has today almost

become an orthodoxy among philosophers and other intellectuals.

In the previous two sections, it was argued that the objections levelled by Hume and Kant against the Cosmological Argument and the Argument from Design are not nearly as cogent as they have been widely taken to be from Schopenhauer onwards. If my defence of these arguments has been sound, it becomes apparent just how wide of the mark are those who adopt an atheistic standpoint so prevalent among philosophers and other intellectuals today. Those who adopt this standpoint, however, go well beyond anything which Hume or Kant can be claimed to have sought to establish. So far as these two eighteenth-century philosophers were concerned that God's existence might not be capable of being established did not mean that God's non-existence could be. Nor, did Kant, if not Hume, take the indemonstrability of God to establish the unreasonableness of faith in God. Most philosophers today go well beyond the agnosticism of Hume and the fideism of Kant by treating belief in the existence of God as somehow philosophically unconscionable. In the case of those who think this way, the philosopher who is likely more than any other to have persuaded them of this opinion is Nietzsche. I conclude this chapter by briefly examining such considerations as Nietzsche adduces on behalf of this view.

By far the best and most sympathetic account of Nietzsche's case against the reasonableness of belief in God is that which Richard Schacht gives in his book on Nietzsche.¹¹⁴ Schacht surely speaks for many more contemporary philosophers than just himself in claiming to find

Nietzsche's emphatic repudiation of any suggestion that a transcendent deity does or might exist, and his often belittling and sometimes harsh treatment of those who fail to do likewise, ... are neither unconsidered nor unreasoned. His ... argument ... is compelling enough ... to render reasonable his contention that it is 'decisive'; and ... come[s] closer to ruling out the God-hypothesis than could be done in any other way.¹¹⁵

Schacht terms Nietzsche's argument a 'historical refutation' or 'genealogical subversion'¹¹⁶ of the God-hypothesis. He bestows the first name upon the argument after an aphorism of Nietzsche's in which the argument is set out in condensed form. The aphorism in question runs:

Historical refutation as the definitive refutation – In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God – today one indicates how the belief that there is a God could *arise* and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God becomes superfluous. – When in former times one had refuted the ‘proofs of the existence of God’ put forward, there always remained the doubt whether better proofs might not be adduced than those just refuted: in those days atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep.¹¹⁷

Schacht summarises this argument of Nietzsche’s as follows. In the absence of any valid proofs of God’s existence, all warrant for belief in God will have been removed were it possible to explain the origin and tenacity of such belief in purely naturalistic terms, without need of positing God. Now, it is possible to explain the origin and tenacity of belief in God’s existence in purely naturalistic terms without any need to posit God. Therefore, all warrant for believing in God’s existence has been removed.

This argument seems perfectly sound when the terms ‘ghost’ or ‘monster’ are substituted for ‘God’. Whether the same holds true when God is the subject of the argument depends upon whether Nietzsche and Schacht are correct on two matters. First, they have to be correct that there are no more sound arguments for God’s existence than there are for the existence of ghosts. Second, they have to be correct that it is possible to provide naturalistic explanations of both the origin and persistence of belief in God that do not require having to postulate the existence of God.

Neither issue, however, seems anything like as straightforward as Schacht and Nietzsche suppose it to be. So far as the first issue is concerned, it is possible – and, by now, I hope, we are in a position – simply to reject their claim that there are no sound arguments for God’s existence. Once the possibility of a sound proof of God’s existence is countenanced, it becomes possible to reject the adequacy of Nietzsche’s naturalistic explanations of the origin and persistence of all beliefs in God’s existence. In cases where people have been led to acquire such a belief as a result of having followed the steps of a sound proof of God’s existence, neither the origination nor persistence of their belief in God’s existence *is* wholly explicable in purely naturalistic terms without need of postulating God. This is so because, in order to understand their having been led to that belief, it is necessary to understand how they have been led to it. To understand this requires

grasping the argument and hence requires coming to apprehend the existence of God. Thus, where people have been led to acquire a belief in God by means of following a sound argument for God's existence, it is impossible to explain their belief without also coming to posit God's existence. Those who espoused the classical conception of philosophy were arguably led to a belief in God's existence through having followed the steps of one or more sound arguments for God's existence. Consequently, no naturalistic explanations of belief in God's existence of the sort proffered by Nietzsche, Marx or Freud are singly or jointly able to account for all instances of theistic belief. In sum, the classical conception of philosophy is no more vulnerable to Nietzsche's genealogical subversion of religious belief than it is to Hume's or Kant's strictures against the speculative theology on which it is ultimately grounded.

The conclusion of this discussion of Hume, Kant and Nietzsche must be that the present-day repudiation of theism in philosophy is ill-founded. There is no reason for rejecting the classical conception.

4

The Wisdom of the Book Revisited

4.1 The hieroglyph of wisdom

If the reasoning of the preceding chapter has been sound, there are no good philosophical arguments for denying God to be the explanation of the universe and of the form of order it exhibits. This being so, there is no good reason for philosophers not to return once more to the classical conception of their subject, provided there are no better ways to obtain wisdom. However, our *interim* conclusion also implies that the monotheistic religions stand closer to metaphysical truth than atheism or agnosticism. The suspicion cannot fail to arise that, perhaps, it is only within the framework of one or other of the monotheistic religions that complete wisdom is to be found, and not by means of philosophy either alone or even primarily.

Each of the three great monotheistic religions considers itself to be the custodian of some supremely important body of truth that has been disclosed to man by God through revelation which is not capable of being known apart from revelation. None of these religions considers it possible to establish its favoured body of doctrine *has* been revealed. Instead, acceptance of all such bodies of doctrine is always made a matter of faith in the veracity of the account of its revelation contained in some text considered sacred by adherents of the religions in question. In the case of Judaism, the relevant text is known in Hebrew as the *Tanach*. This term designates roughly that body of writings which Christians refer to as the 'Old Testament' to distinguish them from those which they believe contain the account of a later and fuller revelation which they accordingly refer to as the 'New Testament'. Muslims accept that both the Jewish and Christian Bible contain accounts of divine revelation, but they regard all such

revelations to have been superseded by a later revelation the contents of which are contained in their sacred text, the Koran.

Each religion considers its favoured sacred text(s) an authoritative statement of some body of revealed truth which man cannot come to know of otherwise than by revelation and whose importance far exceeds all such knowledge as man is capable of discovering for himself independently of revelation. The similar self-understanding which all the religions have of themselves poses for the classical conception of philosophy the following problem. Suppose that one of these religions is, as each claims itself to be, the custodian of some supremely important body of divinely revealed doctrine whose truth is otherwise unknowable. It would follow that those in pursuit of wisdom would do best to place their faith in the teachings of whichever religion they consider most likely to provide the fullest and most comprehensive account of divine revelation than pursue wisdom through engaging in philosophy. The status of revealed religion is, thus, an especially pressing issue for anyone who has come to be persuaded of the truth of theism by means of philosophical speculation.

Much common ground is shared by the classical conception of philosophy and the monotheistic religions. All of them affirm God to be the ultimate explanation of the world, and all equate man's highest good with the love of God. This partial coincidence between the teachings of philosophy and these religions was well known in ancient times. It was reputedly acknowledged by no less a philosophical authority than Aristotle, who, after a doubtless apocryphal encounter with a Jewish sage, is reputed to have called the Jews a 'philosophical people'.¹ Despite this common ground, the classical conception of philosophy in its pagan form differs from these religions by denying there to be any greater wisdom than that which is capable of being discovered through reason alone. Jews and Christians refer to the respective bodies of doctrine which they consider to have been revealed as *the wisdom of God* to distinguish them from such insight as they consider man can discover through reason alone which they call the *wisdom of the world*.² In claiming some otherwise undiscoverable body of wisdom has been disclosed through revelation, each such religion tacitly asserts wisdom comes from faith in the account of the divine revelation of some body of doctrine contained in some sacred text, rather than from philosophy.

The term 'revelation' signifies the communication of some doctrine or precept to man by God by way of some specific human being to

whom God directly discloses the doctrine or precept and who then relays it to others. The immediate recipient of any such divine communicate is known as a 'prophet'. The three religions all broadly share the same view as to what conditions a doctrine or precept must meet in order to count as having been divinely revealed. First, all three religions agree, if some doctrine or precept goes beyond whatever has been previously known or revealed, then it can count as having been revealed to someone only if its putative revelation was accompanied by the occurrence of some miracle within the immediate vicinity of the recipient of the revelation. By 'a miracle' is meant here some occurrence so extraordinary and marvellous as to warrant being supposed the result of divine intervention with the normal course of nature and intended, or, at least, sufficient, to attest to the divine source of the doctrine or precept in question. Second, any purported recipient of some divine revelation must possess outstanding moral probity, judged relative, at least, to the standards of behaviour prevailing in their day. Third, the doctrine or precept in question must be in accord with everything else that is known to be true, as well as with the highest standards of morality. Fourth, in the case of any doctrine that foretells of future events, especially miraculous ones, the course of future events must bear it out, or, at least, not disconfirm it.

Jews, Christians and Muslims all agree on there being *some* body of doctrine which satisfies these four conditions. They do not, of course, on which body of doctrines does so. Orthodox Jews only recognise as having been revealed such doctrines and precepts as have been expressly so depicted in the Tanach, *plus* the entire contents of its first five books. These latter are known in Hebrew as the *Torah*, a term which means literally 'teaching'. Orthodox Jews believe that the books which form the Torah have been revealed on the strength of an oral tradition of theirs according to which these books, together with the accurate interpretation of them, was revealed to Moses during the period of his solitary sojourn upon Mount Sinai at the time of his receiving the Ten Commandments.³ According to this same tradition, the content of this revelation was preserved intact by means of oral transmission until it came to be written down many centuries after its initial revelation to Moses. The first book of the Torah to appear in written form is Deuteronomy or 'book of the law'. This book, according to the Bible, was 'discovered' by the High Priest during the renovation of the Jerusalem Temple which occurred during the reign of King Josiah in the seventh century BC, after the Assyrian conquest of Israel in the eighth century BC and before the Babylonian conquest

of Judah in the sixth century. The 'discovery' of this book marked a significant step in the evolution of Judaism. The subsequent Babylonian conquest of Judah led to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and to the exile in Babylon of many of the former inhabitants of Judah. After the Persian conquest of the Babylonian empire in the fifth century BC, descendants of the exiles from Judah, or 'Jews' as they had by then begun to be called, were permitted and encouraged to return to the homeland of their ancestors. They were granted a measure of self-rule there which enabled them to rebuild the Temple. In the following century, with the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander the Great, Judah fell under Greek control. After the death of Alexander, Judah was subject for several centuries to periods of alternating political control under the Greek Seleucid and Ptolemaic rulers between whom Alexander's former empire had been divided upon his death. In the second century BC, Judah enjoyed a brief interlude of full political autonomy under the rule of the Hasmoneans, before being brought, like so much else of the former Alexandrian empire, under the suzerainty of the Romans. It was during the period between the return from Babylon and the restoration of political autonomy under the Hasmoneans that the constituent of books of the Hebrew Bible achieved their final form and its canonical version became established.⁴

The reason why Jews refer to the first five books of the Old Testament as the 'Torah' or 'teaching' or 'instruction' is that they contain a full statement of the statutes supposedly revealed to Moses during the 40 years which they depict the Jewish people as having spent in the desert between their divinely engineered exodus from slavery in Egypt and their divinely engineered conquest of Canaan under Moses' successor, Joshua. Compliance with these statutes forms part of the terms of a long-standing covenant which God is depicted as having entered into with the Jewish people. The initial such covenant was with Abraham, and was periodically reaffirmed with the later patriarchs, before finally being reaffirmed with the entire 'children of Israel'. This supposedly occurred three months after their departure from Egypt, while they were encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai, immediately before Moses received the Ten Commandments. Chapter 19 of Exodus describes Moses as ascending the mountain and there receiving from God the following instruction:

Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore

you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.⁵

Shortly after, the Ten Commandments are delivered. These were the first instalment of a reputed total of no less than 613 commandments supposedly delivered to Moses by God during the 40 years' wandering. Compliance with these commandments is required of the Jews in return for God's fulfilling his part of the covenant to them. This was to make of them a great and numerous nation in a land of their own. The precepts which form the so-called 'law of Moses' regulate every aspect of life. To this day, orthodox Jews consider themselves bound to comply with them all in so far as compliance with them today is humanly possible. The qualification is necessary, since there are some with which compliance is no longer possible. For example, since the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70 by the Romans following an unsuccessful uprising of the Jews ten years earlier, it has not been possible for Jews to comply with those biblical commandments governing temple sacrifice.

Apart from a statement of the laws themselves and the elaborate narrative of their revelation to Moses, the Torah contains the outline of an entire cosmology. This begins with an account of the divine creation of the world and its gradual population by successively created life-forms and culminates in the creation of man with whose dealings with God the Torah is thereafter exclusively concerned. The Torah chiefly focuses on God's dealings with his 'chosen people', the Jews, and it concludes by narrating the death of their leader, Moses, on the eve of their conquest of Canaan.

The Torah contains an account of the first act of human disobedience towards God which it claims resulted in man's being punished through being expelled from paradise. An early ecological catastrophe in the form of a flood is then described which God is depicted as having engineered to destroy mankind for their perfidy. God finally decides to spare humanity because of the righteousness of Noah whom God saves by instructing him how to escape the coming catastrophe by constructing an ark. After the flood, God enters into a covenant with Noah and his sons in which God undertakes never again to attempt to destroy mankind, while bidding mankind to refrain from murder.⁶

The narrative soon after focuses on the Jewish people. It narrates the

lives of the three patriarchs, beginning with that of Abraham. The Torah depicts God informing the aged but still childless Abraham that a great nation will come from his seed. Upon duly giving birth to their foretold son, Abraham's wife, Sarah, breaks out in joyous laughter from reference to which the name of their son is taken – 'Isaac' meaning 'laughter'. The Torah narrates God testing Abraham's faith by demanding that he sacrifice Isaac. Following an exhibition of Abraham's faith demonstrated by his willingness to carry out the command, God spares Isaac at the last moment, substituting a ram in his place, and reaffirms his covenant with Abraham which is marked by instituting the ritual of circumcision.

There follows an account of the life of Isaac. This includes an account of how Isaac's younger son, Jacob, tricks his infirm and elderly father into bequeathing him his estate rather than bequeathing it to his elder and preferred brother, Esau. While fleeing to escape the wrath of the elder brother whom he has disinherited, Jacob is narrated as encountering God in a dream of a stairway to heaven on which angels ascend and descend and where God reiterates his promise to Abraham. Following this dream, Jacob undertakes to worship God, and, after subsequently wrestling with an angel without being defeated, Jacob commemorates this encounter by changing his name to 'Israel'. The Torah then narrates how the rivalry between the 12 sons of Jacob led the jealous brothers of Jacob's most favoured son, Joseph, to sell Joseph to a passing band of nomads who transport him to Egypt where he is sold into service. Through his singular ability to interpret dreams, Joseph is eventually able to win the favour of Pharaoh by interpreting several of Pharaoh's dreams as warnings of an impending famine and by advising Pharaoh how best to prepare for it. Pharaoh makes Joseph a lieutenant and he is eventually reunited with his family when, during the famine, they come in quest of food. Joseph persuades them to join him in Egypt.

After an indeterminate period, the Bible narrates that there ascends to the Egyptian throne a Pharaoh who in its words 'knew not Joseph'. The fecundity of the descendants of Jacob leads this Pharaoh to regard them as a group of potentially dangerous immigrants who are accordingly enslaved by the Egyptians. To stem their still burgeoning numbers, Pharaoh orders the Egyptians to slaughter the first-born Jewish new-born males to evade which fate befalling hers, the mother of one places her infant son in an ark of bulrushes and surrenders him to the Nile under the watchful eye of his elder sister. He is spotted by Pharaoh's daughter who decides to adopt him and names him 'Moses'.

The boy's sister adroitly manages to persuade the boy's adoptive mother to employ his natural mother as a nurse by which means he learns his true identity. Later, as a young man, having impetuously killed an Egyptian task-master for ill-treating one of his compatriots, Moses flees into the wilderness where he undergoes the first of his many subsequent encounters with God. This took the form of a bush which appeared to burn without being consumed by flames. There he receives from God his mission to rescue the children of Israel from slavery and to deliver them to a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. Then follows the epic story of the Exodus culminating in the revelation of the Ten Commandments and the other ordinances that make up the law of Moses. The Torah ends with an account of Moses' death in sight of the promised land.

The remaining books which compose the Jewish Bible fall into two groups. The first group is known in Hebrew as *Nebiim* or 'prophets', the second *Ketubim* the 'writings'. The books in *Nebiim* continue the narrative of the Jewish people, beginning with an account of the conquest of Canaan under the leadership of Moses' successor, Joshua. They end with the Babylonian exile. More than simply narrate the history of the Israelite nation during this period, these books are putative records of various revelations supposedly undergone during this period by that set of individuals known as the 'prophets'. These individuals regarded themselves, and were regarded by other Jews, as immediate recipients of divine revelations. After Moses, practically all such divine communiques took the form of castigations of the Jewish people issued by God for their failure to observe the Mosaic law, or else they were warnings of the dire consequences that would result from their continued disobedience. The main offence tending to evoke such prophecies was idolatry, the worship of other gods besides that of Moses, plus such exclusive preoccupation with ceremonial observance, particularly Temple sacrifice, as led to the neglect of what in God's eyes, the prophets make clear, were the far more important ethical ordinances contained in the Mosaic law which enjoined justice and loving-kindness. Some prophets foretold of the dire consequences awaiting the Jewish people should they persist in their wrongdoing. Others, made after the destruction of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, foretold of the coming of a *Messiah*. This Hebrew term literally means 'anointed with oil', an allusion to the sacrament undergone at their coronation by kings of Israel which was intended to symbolise conferment upon them of divinely sanctioned authority. The messianic prophecies foretell how a future Messiah will restore the

spiritual and temporal fortunes of the Jewish people by reuniting them in a secure kingdom in which they will enjoy perpetual peace with all other nations who will finally have come to recognise and worship the one true God as well as to observe the Noachian laws.

The collection of biblical books known as *Ketubim* or 'writings' form more of a miscellany. Some narrate the history of the Jews after the Babylonian conquest up to and including their return to Judah. Others are non-narrative in form. Of these latter, the most notable for our purposes are the psalms and the so-called wisdom literature. The former are devotional songs of praise to God. Many of these are attributed, almost certainly erroneously so, to David, the second king of Israel who was responsible for making Jerusalem its capital. The wisdom literature is made up of the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The former are attributed, again almost certainly mistakenly so, to David's son, Solomon. It was he who, upon succeeding his father to the throne, built the Temple at Jerusalem. The literature attributed to him comprises discursive ethical teachings with a pronounced monotheistic character and it was almost certainly composed much later during the post-exilic period, bearing as it does the marked stamp of Hellenistic influence.

Collectively, the three groups of books comprising the Jewish Bible are known in Hebrew as the *Tanach*. This term is an acronym formed by combining the first letter of the Hebrew names for each of its three constituent groups of books: Torah or Pentateuch; Nebiim or Prophets, and Ketubim or writings. Their original written form was as scrolls of parchment known in Hebrew as *Sefarim*. It is from replicas of these that the annual cycle of weekly Sabbath synagogue readings of the Torah continues to this day, a practice first instituted by Ezra in the period immediately after the return of the Jews from Babylon. During the Hellenistic period, when Jews began to speak Greek, these scrolls came to be called *biblia* from the Greek word, *biblion*, meaning 'parchment'. It is from this term that derives the English word 'Bible', a term originally signifying *the Book*.

As previously remarked, apart from its first five books, Jews believe that nothing else has been revealed apart from what is expressly so depicted in the Tanach. By contrast, Christians believe all such doctrines and precepts have been revealed as are expressly so depicted in the New Testament. These include the ethical teachings of Jesus, together with certain other doctrines which are depicted as having been revealed to certain early apostles and disciples of Jesus. Christians only believe the Old Testament to be the record of an

earlier revelation because the New Testament depicts Jesus as having done so. Christians only accept the Old Testament account of revelation subject to its being interpreted and qualified so as to be made consonant with what they take to be the teachings of the New Testament. Likewise, Muslims accord the status of revelation in the first instance only to such doctrines as the Koran contains. This work was written by Mohammed, so Muslims believe, under dictation from the angel, Gabriel, acting as an intermediary for God or Allah. Like the Christian attitude towards Old Testament accounts of revelation, Muslims accept the Bible to contain an account of an earlier revelation. But again, they do so only subject to interpreting it so as bring its teachings into accord with those imparted to Mohammed in what they consider to be the primary revelation. In what follows, for reasons of space, I shall confine discussion to a consideration of Judaism and Christianity. The conclusions of this discussion, however, will also apply to Muslim accounts of revelation.

The Christian Bible, therefore, includes the Hebrew Scriptures, plus those writings which form the *New Testament*. These writings cover a much briefer historical period than that covered by the Old Testament. They span no more than the first one and a half centuries following the birth of Jesus. Like the Old Testament, the constituent books of the New Testament are highly heterogeneous in form. They fall into one or other of five groups. The first group comprises the so-called *gospels* of which three purport to be eye-witness accounts of the life and the teachings of Jesus. These contain accounts of the so-called 'passion' of Christ by which term is meant the trial and execution by crucifixion of Jesus, as well as his reputed resurrection and appearance to his disciples three days later culminating in his ascension. The second group of writings comprise the so-called *Acts of the Apostles*. These narrate the early history and spread of the Church – that is, followers of Jesus – in the century following his crucifixion. The third group is made up of the various letters or epistles to various branches of the early Church written by Paul. They recount how a vision of the posthumous Jesus appeared to Paul urging him to desist from persecuting the followers of Jesus as he had previously been doing. Instead, Paul is urged to spread Jesus' teachings beyond the original Jewish audience to which they had initially been addressed. These are usually taken to be the earliest writings of the New Testament, and arguably, therefore, had enormous influence upon the shape and content of the gospels. The fourth group of writings comprises other epistles or letters written by other disciples of Jesus. And finally, the New

Testament contains *Revelation*. This book is an account of a prophetic vision undergone by an early disciple of Jesus of the fate that is supposedly to befall mankind upon the return or second coming of Jesus. Then, so it claims, the dead will arise from their graves to receive final judgement and their just deserts: true believers will gain eternal life, unbelievers eternal damnation through being consigned to hell.

According to Christians, the principal truth revealed to man by God is that Jesus is the Messiah in the Christian sense of being the saviour of mankind from whom all who so believe he is will gain salvation in the form of an eternal life of supreme happiness spent in loving communion with God and one another. This is provided they have atoned for their sins and endeavoured to comply with Jesus' ethical teachings. Of these, the primary teaching is the supreme importance of the love of God and of one's neighbour. All who believe Jesus to be the Messiah and who so endeavour to act thereby become eligible for the supreme good. This is so, irrespective of whether they are of Jewish descent. Believers in the divinity of Jesus form members of a New Israel with whom God has established a New Covenant, the old one between God and the Jews having been abrogated at the time of the incarnation by the failure of the Jews to recognise Jesus as their Messiah.

In considering which doctrines and precepts, if any, have been revealed, there are several additional complications besides those stemming from straightforward differences among adherents of the different religions as to which texts are to be thought of as containing accounts of divine revelation. The additional complications arise from the variety of interpretive techniques which have been developed within the various religions for identifying which precise revealed doctrines are to be thought of as contained within their sacred texts.

It will be recalled that, among the conditions which any doctrine or precept must satisfy before it can be thought of as having been revealed to man, is the condition that the doctrine or precept accord with truth and goodness and hence with all that is known to be true and good. As a result of the need for all putative revelation to satisfy this condition, a number of hermeneutical strategies have grown up within the various monotheistic religions to explain how the condition is met by doctrines which are depicted in their sacred texts as having been revealed, but which would fail to satisfy the condition if understood literally. Such doctrines are made to satisfy the condition by being assigned non-literal interpretations which accord with truth and goodness as understood. Through recourse to this hermeneutic

device, such philosophically minded biblical exegetes as Philo of Alexandria and Moses Maimonides have been led to claim the Bible not only to be devoid of any teachings contrary to reason and sound morality. They have also been claimed to contain, albeit in veiled figurative form, all of the wisdom that is discoverable through philosophy. Recourse to non-literal construal of biblical verses, therefore, not only permits falsehood to be read out of the Bible. It also enables philosophical profundity to be read into it. Philo was able to find in allegorical form in the Bible virtually the entire contents of Plato's philosophy. And, by deploying the same hermeneutical strategy, Maimonides was able to discover the Bible to contain in allegorical form all of Aristotle's philosophy that Maimonides considered consistent with revelation and not contrary to reason.

Philo and Aristotle were both adamant that the Bible contains truths beyond those knowable through philosophy alone. An example of such a doctrine, for Maimonides, was that the physical world had been created in time rather than having existed from eternity, which latter doctrine Maimonides supposed Aristotle to have maintained. Likewise, the early Church Fathers resorted to allegorical interpretation to reconcile the prophecies and ethical injunctions found in the Old Testament with the contents of the New Testament, as well as to find in the Old Testament all sorts of prefigurings of Jesus.

Beyond such wisdom as the Bible has been claimed to contain through recourse to an allegorical approach to biblical hermeneutics, Jewish mystics have claimed to discern in the Torah, albeit in concealed form, a still greater form of divinely revealed wisdom than any which Maimonides and Philo claimed to be able to do by means of allegorical interpretation. Because each letter of the Hebrew alphabet stands for a number, and because the Hebrew alphabet contains only consonants and no vowels, written Hebrew words admit of a wide variety of different possible interpretations. The same collection of letters can be read as signifying all manner of different words depending on which vowels are inserted between the consonants. Additionally, each Hebrew word can be interpreted as alluding to any other or others with the numerical sum of whose constituent letters the sum of its own letters is equal. *Gematria* or acrostics is the art of finding all sorts of hidden meanings in biblical verses by treating its individual constituent words as alluding to or standing for other words made up of the same letters or whose letters form sums equal to those of the words in the text. This technique is incorporated within Kabala, a mystical approach to the discernment of revealed wisdom in

the Bible. As can be imagined, this form of biblical interpretation lends itself to even more spectacular flights of hermeneutic fancy than can be obtained through the allegorical method. In sum, whichever way one looks at it, as soon as the Bible is regarded as containing any record of revelation, it becomes nothing less than a veritable hieroglyph of wisdom.

Our task is now to consider what wisdom, if any, the Bible and other forms of sacred literature may be thought to contain and whether any such wisdom as they do contain compromises the claim of philosophy to be regarded as *the* way to wisdom for those able to engage in it. On this question, it is possible to distinguish several different alternative opinions. At one extreme lies the position of religious orthodoxy which is similar in the case of all three religions. Those who adopt this position maintain that some of this literature is an accurate and authoritative written record of some body of revealed wisdom whose extent and profundity far exceed any wisdom of which man is capable by his own unaided effort. As remarked, orthodox Jews, Christians and Muslims are in mutual disagreement as to precisely which set of writings provides the authoritative account of revelation. Hence, they disagree on what precise body of doctrine has been revealed and hence constitutes wisdom.

Among those who adopt the orthodox position, it is possible to make a further distinction. This is between those who affirm and those who deny that, in addition to a body of revealed wisdom greater than any discoverable through reason alone, the Bible also contains such wisdom as man is capable of arriving at through reason alone, albeit often dressed up in figurative language. Among notable figures who affirm it does are Philo and Maimonides; among notable figures who maintain the opposite is Tertullian.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from the position of religious orthodoxy on the question of what wisdom is contained in the Bible is that typically adopted by atheists. Although some are willing to accept that the Bible contains valuable ethical teachings, atheists typically deny it contains any genuine wisdom at all. They prefer instead to view all such literature as being a repository of nothing but error and mystification. Notable among atheists who espouse such a sceptical view are Marx and Nietzsche.

Between the extremes of orthodoxy and atheism over the question of what wisdom is contained in the Bible and other sacred literature lies a third intermediary position. As with religious orthodoxy and unlike atheists, those who adopt this intermediate position affirm the

existence of God and the supreme value of the love of God. Unlike all forms of religious orthodoxy, and more like atheists however, those who adopt the third intermediate position deny the Bible and any other sacred literature contain any wisdom greater than, or even as much as, that which man is capable of acquiring by means of philosophy alone. The principal and most notable representative of this third position is Spinoza. In what follows, I aim to defend a variant of the intermediate position against both its orthodox and atheistic rivals. I shall proceed by first rehearsing and criticising the position of religious orthodoxy in both its Christian and Jewish variants, before presenting and defending the intermediate position. Having done that, I shall conclude the chapter by considering whether the Bible can be thought of as containing as much wisdom as or nearly as much wisdom as is capable of being achieved by means of philosophy. Here I shall be concerned to defend a position much closer to Maimonides than to Spinoza, but one which does not have recourse to elaborate allegorical interpretation.

4.2 Revelation in Christian orthodoxy

Although Judaism is much older than Christianity, I shall begin by considering the younger of the two religions since it is so much more widespread today than the older one. Christian orthodoxy equates wisdom with acceptance of two doctrines, not discoverable through philosophy alone, on the strength of supposing them to have been revealed by God to man. The first is that salvation, in the form of a blissful eternal life, awaits all and only those who consider Jesus to be the incarnation of God who assumed this human form in order to allow himself to be killed and thereby to serve as an atonement for the sins of all who accept him to be such, and who repent of their sins and endeavour to live as Jesus enjoined. This is principally to practise the love of God and one's neighbour. The second doctrine is that, by undergoing the atoning incarnation in the form of Jesus, God effectively abrogated all the other laws and doctrines which had previously been revealed to the Jews. These included most notably the doctrine that the Jews are God's chosen people who must observe the law revealed to Moses. The incarnation is supposed to have established a new covenant between God and the members of a new Israel formed from all who accept Jesus to be the Messiah.

Clearly, the teachings with which Christian orthodoxy equates wisdom are not discoverable by reason on its own. What considera-

tions do orthodox Christians offer on their behalf? Some orthodox Christians eschew any attempt to offer *arguments* in favour of them. They claim their acceptance to be a matter of faith which, in turn, they regard to be the product of a saving grace which they equate with the entry of the divine spirit into the heart and mind of the believer. This, however, is by no means the only position of orthodox Christians. There are some orthodox Christians who attempt to adduce considerations in support of their favoured doctrines. Of recent attempts by orthodox Christian thinkers to do so, few have been made with greater philosophical acumen than that made by Richard Swinburne.⁷ Accordingly, I will focus on Swinburne's arguments.

In arguing on behalf of Christian orthodoxy, Swinburne makes an assumption for which he has argued at length elsewhere. He assumes that human beings are capable of coming to know, without need of appeal to revelation, that it is probable that God exists. Swinburne's confidence in the probability of God's existence leans heavily on his acceptance of probabilistic variants of the Cosmological Argument and the Argument from Design which earlier we defended as being sound. Swinburne's theistic assumption, although not its probabilistic variant, is common ground to all three monotheistic religions as well as to the classical conception of philosophy in both its pagan and Judaeo-Christian forms. Consequently, it shall be treated as unproblematic in what follows.

Against the background of his tacitly assumed theism, Swinburne seeks to defend the orthodox Christian account of what wisdom has been revealed to man by God through endeavouring to establish two further theses. Together, these two theses entail that the Christian view of what has been revealed to man is superior to all other accounts of revelation. Swinburne's first thesis is that, assuming God exists, Christianity possesses a significant degree of intrinsic probability. As he puts it, 'if there is a God there is good a priori reason for expecting a propositional revelation, in connection with an atoning incarnation; and for expecting some means to be provided [viz. the Church] for preserving and rightly interpreting that revelation for new centuries and culture'.⁸ Swinburne's second thesis is that, granted that the occurrence of an atoning incarnation possesses a significant degree of intrinsic probability, the New Testament provides sufficiently compelling historical evidence for the occurrence of the events which it describes as to warrant belief in the main doctrines constitutive of Christianity. As he puts the claim, 'There is, among the

so-called great religions of the world, only one serious candidate for having a body of doctrine which is to be believed on the grounds that it is revealed, and that is the Christian revelation.¹⁹ In the case of each of these two theses, I shall now consider the chief considerations which Swinburne advances on their behalf before ascertaining how compelling they are.

On behalf of his first thesis, Swinburne advances two claims about human beings which together provide grounds for it. The first claim is that human beings possess free will in the sense that their acts of choice are not causally determined by their formed characters and the circumstances present to them on the occasions of their acts of choosing. Swinburne's second claim about human beings is that they can possess free will in this sense only in consequence of being endowed with morally recalcitrant natural inclinations which make it difficult, although not impossible, for them to act in the ways in which they morally ought to act. Swinburne argues that human possession of free will, together with human possession of the morally wicked natural inclinations which they need in order to possess free will in his sense, makes it significantly *a priori* probable that, at some point in time, if God exists, that He will undergo an atoning incarnation culminating in his death. Swinburne sets out his argument so:

A God who made human beings with capacities to do actions of supererogatory goodness and to make themselves saints would think it good that they should do so, and might well help them to do so. If they do become saints, he would think that was such a good thing that it was worth preserving them after this life to pursue the supremely worthwhile life of Heaven, centred in the worship of God. Although God could from the start have made human beings fitted for Heaven, it is obviously a good thing that they should have the opportunity to choose for themselves whether or not to make themselves fitted for heaven; and so that he should make them with a character largely unformed but one which they could choose, by deliberate action (or negligence) over a period, for good or ill.... In order to have a significant choice between what we believe good and what we believe evil, we must have bad natural inclinations. For to believe something good is already to recognise it as worth doing and so to be inclined to do it, in the absence of contrary inclinations. Those contrary inclinations, of sloth, lust, greed, pride and such like, with which we are born, give us a significant choice as to whether or not to do the

good; but they make it difficult for us to make atonement for our sins, and to help others to whom we have obligations to make atonement for our sins [that is, wrongs against God including not worshipping Him, or otherwise dishonouring Him by treating his creatures other than as God's creatures should be treated]. In that situation, ... God ... [has reason to] become man and live on man's behalf a perfect human life culminating in a death arising from its perfection.¹⁰

According to Swinburne, therefore, what makes it to some degree likely a priori that God has revealed the truth of Christian doctrine is the combination of the following putative facts. The first is the probability that God exists. The second is the certainty, assuming the existence of God, that human beings would have been endowed with free will and hence with bad natural inclinations that are a condition of their possessing it and which make it difficult for them to be saintly. The third is the additional certainty, assuming the existence of God, that God would do everything God could to assist humans to choose freely to become saintly and thereby eligible to enjoy the most supreme good of which they capable – namely, an eternal life spent in worshipful loving communion with God. Swinburne offers the following succinct summary of his argument. 'If there is a God who wills men's eternal well-being and chooses to allow men the choice of whether to seek it or not, there is reason to expect that he will take steps to ensure that they acquire information as to how to attain that well-being....'¹¹

What are we to make of Swinburne's argument? We may concede to Swinburne that, if human beings are to possess free will in the sense in which he imputes it to them, it is necessary that they be endowed by nature with morally recalcitrant natural inclinations which would render it difficult, although not impossible, for them to choose always to act as they morally ought. We may also concede to Swinburne that God will do everything possible to enable human beings to become eligible to enjoy a supreme good which consists in their enjoying an eternal life spent in worshipful communion with God. Even with all these claims granted, however, before it need be conceded that there is some significant degree of a priori probability that God would at some point undergo an atoning incarnation of Himself, there are two further claims of Swinburne's which must also be granted. The first is that human beings *do* possess free will in the sense imputed to them by Swinburne. The second is that, should human beings possess free

will in this sense, they would be aided in freely choosing to become saintly by God's undergoing, and revealing that He had undergone, an atoning incarnation. Neither claim need be granted.

As regards the first, there is hardly a more vexed question in philosophy than whether human beings possess free will in the sense in which Swinburne wishes to ascribe it to them. Swinburne maintains that it is *obvious* that any good creator God would endow human beings with this form of free will, despite a necessary condition of their possessing it being, on his view, a liability to do wrong. To recall, Swinburne claims,

Although God could from the start have made humans fitted for heaven, it is obviously a good thing that they should have the opportunity to choose for themselves whether or not to make themselves fitted for Heaven; and so that he should make them with a character largely unformed but one which they could choose, by deliberate action (or negligence) over a period of time, to mould for good or ill. . . . [O]f course our world is a world which, if God has made it, he has made like this. It is a world where, through our choices, we form our characters.¹²

To assert, as Swinburne does here, that it is *obvious* that, if God created human beings, then they would have been endowed with free will, presupposes that it is obvious that free will is something with which God *could* have endowed them. Such a claim presupposes that it is obvious that the notion of free will, in Swinburne's libertarian understanding of this notion, is a coherent one. That it is, however, is by no means at all obvious. There is a long and venerable tradition within philosophy whose members include many eminent theologians which denies free will in this sense to be coherent.¹³

The basic reason why the coherence of this notion of free will has been denied can best be illustrated by means of an example. Suppose a human being has some morally conclusive reason for acting in a certain way. For example, suppose someone has a morally conclusive reason to assist their elderly neighbour to cross a busy road by carrying their heavy basket for them. Suppose the person who has this morally conclusive reason to help their neighbour is, at the time that the act is called for, subject to some inclination which strongly disinclines him to assist his neighbour. Say, for example, the person feels tired or desires to get home as quickly as possible to watch a football match on television. If human beings possess free will in the sense in

which Swinburne wishes to ascribe it to them, it has to be true of the human being in question that he is both able to choose to go to the assistance of his neighbour and yet is equally capable of choosing not to do so. Moreover, whichever action the person chooses has to be up to the person in question, rather than being a purely random event for which that person cannot be deemed responsible. The problem with the coherence of this notion of free will can be brought out as follows. Assume, for the sake of argument, that the person decides to assist his neighbour. Either there is some reason why he so decided or there is not. If there is some reason why the individual decided so to act, then, given this reason, whatever it is, he could not have decided other than to assist his neighbour. Had he been able to, the reason why he decided as he did would not account for his decision and hence would not be the reason he chose as he did, contrary to hypothesis. Alternatively, if there is no reason why he decided to assist his neighbour rather than pass by his neighbour, then his decision to assist his neighbour will have been a purely random occurrence for which he may not be deemed responsible.

Suppose, however, we grant Swinburne's notion of free will to be a perfectly coherent one, so that, in this sense of the term, free will is something with which God could have endowed human beings. Even so, we may still wonder why someone should be supposed to be assisted in freely choosing to become saintly through believing God has incarnated Himself for the purpose of making an atonement for human sins. Such belief can be supposed to assist people in becoming saintly, only if we suppose that, in the absence of such a belief, human beings would have lacked the wherewithal for acquiring sufficient knowledge of God's existence and their moral obligations, including the need to atone for wrongdoing, as would be needed to enable them to become saintly. There is, however, simply no reason to suppose that, without belief in the occurrence of an atoning incarnation of God, human beings would have lacked sufficient knowledge of God and of their moral obligations to enable them to become saintly. Hence, there is no reason to suppose the occurrence of an atoning incarnation a priori likely. Accordingly, we may conclude that Swinburne has not provided any good reason in support of his thesis that the constitutive doctrines of Christianity possess a significant degree of intrinsic probability.

Let us, therefore, proceed to consider the second thesis that Swinburne advances on behalf of Christian orthodoxy. This, to recall, is that, given the background assumption of theism, plus the further

background assumption of the intrinsic likelihood of some form of atoning incarnation of God, the New Testament constitutes sufficiently good historical evidence for the occurrence of the putative seminal events which are narrated in it as to warrant belief in the occurrence of these events. The chief such events are those which pertain to the life, teachings and death of Jesus – most especially, to the last, above all his so-called resurrection from the dead.

So far as the teachings of Jesus are concerned, Swinburne claims that the New Testament provides good historical evidence for ascribing to Jesus the following three precepts. The first is the supreme ethical importance of the love of God and of one's neighbour and the priority such love has over the elaborate ritual observances enjoined by the Mosaic law which Jesus' teachings can be considered as having been designed to replace. The second is Jesus' status as Messiah whose divinely ordained mission was to establish a 'new Israel' encompassing all who are prepared to recognise his spiritual authority and to endeavour to live in accordance with his ethical teachings. The third is that all and only those who endeavour so to live will be granted eternal life in the future.

The chief biographical facts concerning Jesus for which Swinburne claims that the New Testament can be thought to provide good historical evidence fall into two groups. Into the first group fall those facts which pertain to the so-called 'Passion' of Jesus. These include his arrest, trial and execution by crucifixion, together with his subsequent miraculous resurrection, which event, if it occurred, claims Swinburne, can be deemed to vouchsafe the veracity of Jesus' teachings. The second group of biographical facts concerning Jesus appertain to the sacrament which Jesus supposedly instituted at his last supper. Here, on the eve of his Passion, Jesus supposedly distributed consecrated bread and wine to his disciples, describing them as his flesh and blood. In so doing, Jesus is interpreted as having deliberately identified himself with the sacramental lamb which at the time of the Passover festival Jews were required to slaughter as a sin offering and which they were enjoined to eat at the Passover meal to commemorate their deliverance from slavery. By supposedly so identifying himself, Jesus is interpreted as having intimated that his imminent crucifixion is to be thought of as a sin offering through which atonement is to be made and deliverance obtained by the members of the new Israel constituted by his followers.

To what extent is Swinburne correct in claiming that the New Testament can be thought to offer sufficiently reliable historical

evidence for the chief events narrated in it as to justify belief in their occurrence? It is one thing, and arguably not unreasonable, to regard the New Testament as historical evidence sufficiently compelling as to warrant belief in the existence during the Roman occupation of a Palestinian Jew named Jesus, and for believing such a person to have proclaimed himself Messiah, espoused certain ethico-religious teachings, and to have attracted a band of followers before being crucified by the Romans for his having proclaimed himself Messiah. It is an entirely different matter, and one for which, ultimately, there is little reason, to view the New Testament as constituting sufficiently compelling historical evidence as to justify supposing such a person, were he to have existed, to have been the incarnation of God who had assumed such a human form in order to serve as an atonement for the sins of mankind and thereby to make eternal life possible for all and only those who believe this man to have been such.

There are several grounds for such scepticism. First, it is now widely supposed that the first New Testament writings in order of composition were the epistles of Paul. These are widely taken to have been composed in about 50–60 CE. This was several decades before the gospels were written which undoubtedly were influenced by Paul's epistles. Unlike the apostles of Jesus, Paul never personally encountered Jesus during his life on earth, but only by way of visions of Jesus which occurred to Paul well after the crucifixion. It was in one such vision that Paul claims Jesus revealed to him his true identity.¹⁴ Paul seems to have been the first to receive from Jesus any intimation of his divine status, not in the sense of his having been Messiah but in the sense of having been an incarnation of God. The latter claim is not one which there is any evidence Jesus made about himself during his lifetime. Nor is this claim implied by his assertion that he was the Messiah. For this merely meant he was 'anointed' or 'sanctified', a status that had been enjoyed by all past kings of Israel in the house of David as well as by high priests. Nor is the truth of the claim something which, at the time of its supposed occurrence, the resurrection of Jesus would necessarily have been thought to establish. For, at the time, other individuals were thought to have been miraculously resurrected from the dead, such as Enoch, Elijah and Lazarus, without such miracles having been supposed to confer any divine status upon them.

On the other hand, there are several biographical facts about Paul which can be thought to count as circumstantial evidence against the occurrence of any such miracle. These include the fact Paul came from and grew up in Tarsus. This was home to one of the several mystery

cults flourishing at the time which centred around the myth of the killing and resurrection of a god. As has been argued by Hyam Maccoby,¹⁵ and as has also been suggested by others before him,¹⁶ when viewed as a religion distinct from the Judaism from which it sprang, Christianity must be regarded as having been founded by Paul rather than Jesus. This is because it is Paul not Jesus who must be thought of as having been the first to teach the divine status of Jesus. Arguably, he did this by transposing onto Jesus the motif of the dying-resurrected god through the periodic ritual re-enactment of the death and resurrection and of whom initiates renewed their own lives. Until Paul effected this transposition, the followers of Jesus had not regarded him in any different way from how he had regarded himself. This was as a purely human being differing from others only in having been given the divine mission to be the Jewish Messiah, in the sense of their temporal leader.

Likewise, it is Paul, not Jesus, who is responsible for having superimposed onto Jesus' last meal the symbolism belonging to the ritual meals associated with the pagan mystery cults. In such meals, a slaughtered animal or a combination of bread and wine is identified with the slaughtered god and consumed by celebrants as a way of renewing their lives through identifying with him. Again, Paul's version of the Last Supper chronologically precedes the gospel accounts which in consequence are likely to have been influenced by the construction Paul placed upon it. As Maccoby astutely points out¹⁷, Paul states, in the account he gives of the Last Supper,¹⁸ that his knowledge of what Jesus said to his disciples on this occasion came directly from what Jesus told Paul that he had said then in a posthumous vision. Paul did not obtain this information from those apostles of Jesus who actually attended the meal. Nor did its re-enactment form part of the ritual of the Jerusalem Church established by the original disciples of Jesus immediately following his death.

As for Jesus' ethical teachings, they contain nothing that was not a standard part of the orthodox Pharisaism of his day, except in so far as Jesus had been convinced that he was living in a period immediately prior to some imminent divinely engineered cataclysm in which normal moral conventions would be suspended. This holds true not just in respect of Jesus' willingness to set aside the normal Sabbath laws which prohibit any form of labour in order to tend the sick and satisfy pressing needs such as hunger. It applies also to his claim that the most important ethical precept of the Torah is that which enjoins the love of God and one's neighbour.

Despite the New Testament being at pains to portray the Pharisees and Jesus as being mutually opposed to each other, there was in reality no genuine doctrinal discord between Jesus and the Pharisees at the time. The New Testament claim that there was arguably arose from two pressing needs felt by members of the early Pauline Church. The first was to reach an accommodation with the Roman authorities in whose territories the early Christians sought to propagate their creed. Such an accommodation was arguably achieved by their absolving the Romans of responsibility for Jesus' death through displacing responsibility for it onto another group. The second need of members of the early church was to portray God as rejecting the Jews in favour of the Gentile followers of Paul's divinised version of Jesus to whom Paul had turned having failed to persuade the Jews of his version of events. For, after the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70, the Jews had largely all become Pharisee in outlook and, by this time, had uniformly come to reject Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

In sum, when read with sensitivity to its Jewish context, and in the absence of supposing there to be any *a priori* reason for expecting an atoning incarnation, the New Testament provides slender, if any, evidence in favour of the truth of any of the doctrines to which Christians assign the status of revealed truth. Do those doctrines and precepts fare any better which orthodox Judaism looks on as having been revealed? It is to this question we now turn.

4.3 Revelation in Jewish orthodoxy

As earlier remarked, there are three main doctrines which Jewish orthodoxy regards as having been revealed and which would otherwise have remained unknowable. The first is that God has chosen the Jews for the purpose of bringing knowledge of God's existence to the world, for which task God has extended to the Jews a special measure of providential care. This includes, most notably, having provided them with a 'land flowing with milk and honey' in which to dwell. The second doctrine is that, to accomplish their divinely ordained mission, it is incumbent upon Jews, but only Jews, to observe, so far as is humanly possible, all such precepts as the Pentateuch depicts God having ordained through the mediation of Moses. The third doctrine is that, at some unspecified future date, a Jewish leader or Messiah will arise around whom the Jewish people will reunite in a restored kingdom of their own which shall enjoy peace with all other nations as a result of the latter having come to acknowledge the exis-

tence of God and to abide by the Noachic laws. Combined with the foreseen return by the Jews to the observances of the Mosaic laws, universal adherence to monotheism and the Noachic laws will usher in an age of universal peace and justice. Jewish orthodoxy regards these doctrines as having been revealed on the basis of faith in the biblical account of their revelation. As with our consideration of Christian orthodoxy, we must now consider whether there is any reason to accept or reject the biblical account of their revelation.

Anyone who accepts the biblical account is required to make the two suppositions. The first is that the Bible would not have contained an account of the revelation of these doctrines, unless that account were correct. In other words, it must be supposed that these doctrines and precepts would never have occurred to those individuals to whom the Bible portrays God as having revealed these doctrines unless God had done something special to cause the thought of these doctrines and precepts to occur to these individuals on the occasions on which the Bible portrays them as receiving these revelations. The second is that, more or less simultaneously with these individuals entertaining notions of these doctrines and precepts, God suspended the normal laws of nature so as to bring about, within their vicinity, one or more miracles which were designed to vouchsafe the divine authorship of the thoughts of these doctrines and precepts which were occurring in the minds of these individuals, or else which otherwise to attest to their validity. Neither supposition bears close scrutiny.

There would be reason to make the first supposition, only if it were otherwise inexplicable how the Bible might have come to contain a narrative account of the revelation of these doctrines and precepts. It is, however, assuredly by no means otherwise inexplicable why it should contain such accounts. As we have seen, the Tanach depicts the first two doctrines as having been revealed many centuries before the Tanach itself came to be written. Even supposing that, at the time the Pentateuch came to be written down, the idea of God had long been familiar to the Jewish people, and even supposing that the narrative which the text records had previously been transmitted orally, there is plenty of scope, and much textual evidence, for supposing that much of the early narrative of the divine revelation of these doctrines and precepts to be a fiction.

Suppose, however, that the Bible were a faithful and accurate record of genuine occasions on which real historical individuals first came to entertain notions of the various doctrines and precepts which the Bible depicts as being instances of revelation. Suppose further that the

manner in which these individuals came to entertain the notions of these doctrines and precepts was such as to suggest to them that these thoughts had occurred to them because of something special which God had done to cause them to occur. There would still only be reason to suppose that God had done something special to cause the thought of these doctrines and precepts to occur to these individuals, if it were otherwise impossible to explain how such individuals came to entertain the thought of these doctrines and precepts and to suppose God responsible for their having done so. It is, however, anything but inexplicable how else these things might have come about.

Consider the first of the three doctrines: that which affirms the Jews to be God's chosen people. It has earlier been argued that human beings can arrive at a knowledge of God's existence *without* need of revelation. In order for God's existence to become universally known, therefore, there is no need of God to choose any people through whom to make His existence universally known. Suppose the Bible does provide a historically accurate record of some occasion on which some genuine historical individual first came to entertain the notion of the Jews having been chosen by God. And suppose that the occasion was such as to make this individual suppose God had done something special to cause him to entertain this notion. Even so, we can construct a far simpler explanation why such a notion might have occurred to such an individual, and in a manner which made him suppose God responsible for its having done so, than to suppose God did something special to bring this about. Rather than God having done anything special to cause any individual to entertain the notion of the Jews being God's chosen people, all we need suppose is that the notion occurred to those individuals to whom God is claimed to have revealed it as a result of these individuals having personally witnessed, or, as would be more likely, as a result of their having previously reflected upon, certain especially fortuitous, real or fictitious, episodes in the early folk history of the Jewish people which led these individuals to suppose God had intervened with the course of nature to protect the Jews. To explain why such individuals might have made God responsible for such a notion occurring to them, all we need suppose is that this notion first occurred to these individuals while they were in some abnormal psychological state, such as a dream or waking vision, in which it was conveyed to them by some dream figure and was attended by circumstances indicative of its having been communicated by God.

Besides this one, there is a second and perhaps ultimately still more

plausible alternative explanation why those who first narrated the early history of the Jews might have interwoven fictitious accounts of God's having revealed this doctrine to real or fictitious individuals. All we need suppose is that reflection on the real or fictitious history of this people had led the initial narrators of their history to form the notion that the Jews had been chosen by God and wove accounts of the reception of this doctrine into the accounts of the lives of the early folk-heroes of the Jews.

Over the orthodox Jewish view of the status of this doctrine, each of the two alternative naturalistic explanations of the biblical account of the revelation of this doctrine has one enormous advantage. Neither naturalistic explanation requires that supposing that any initial occurrence of this notion to anyone was accompanied or precipitated by any genuine miracles. To explain the occurrence of this notion to anyone, as well as to explain how God was made responsible for this notion having first occurred to anyone, it is sufficient merely to suppose that those individuals who might have first entertained it had previously witnessed or had reflected upon events especially fortuitous from the Jewish point of view. These events were purely natural occurrences, but because highly unusual could not be satisfactorily explained by the people at the time, save by their having supposed them to have been specially engineered by God. To someone witnessing or reflecting upon such an event(s), it would not seem unnatural to suppose that they had been specially engineered by some divinity. Hence it would not be unnatural for them to conclude that God was displaying towards the Jews some especially providential care. Nor would it be unnatural for anyone to whom any such thought may have occurred to have gone on to make God responsible for its having done so. This is especially so, if such a thought had initially occurred in the form of a statement to this effect uttered by some character who had appeared to them in a dream or other abnormal state. Hence, we can see how the Bible might have come to contain an account of God having revealed to certain individuals that the Jews were a chosen people without our needing to suppose that God had done so or that any genuine miracles had occurred. By contrast, the orthodox Jewish account of the status of this doctrine requires us to believe that it occurred to those individuals to whom the Bible depicts God as having revealed it, and to believe that its occurrence was accompanied by at least one or more miracles. In sum, there is a perfectly good naturalistic explanation which is far simpler than the orthodox one of why the Bible should have depicted God as having revealed that the Jews

were a chosen people. Being simpler than it, there is reason to prefer to the orthodox view this naturalistic explanation why the Bible contains an account of the revelation of such a doctrine. Since the naturalistic account provides no reason for supposing that the doctrine was revealed, there is no reason for believing it to be true because revealed.

For much the same sort of reason, there is less reason to suppose the Mosaic law to have been revealed to Moses in the manner depicted by the Bible than to suppose that these precepts first arose by quite natural processes, being promulgated either by Moses or, as is more likely, by much later figures, with God's being made responsible for revealing them to Moses only much later. The Bible narrates that God conveyed these precepts to Moses verbally, that is, by having spoken them to him. Given that a cardinal doctrine of orthodox Judaism is the immateriality of God, it follows that what the Bible states with respect to their mode of delivery to Moses cannot be understood literally but has to be understood figuratively. Since, as Spinoza was among the first to make abundantly clear, the Bible often describes God as responsible for events that have a perfectly manifest natural explanation, the figure of speech used in the case of the source of these precepts can easily be interpreted as having been intended to convey no more than that Moses came to form the notion of these precepts for himself without their having been suggested to him by anyone else. In this case, even if Moses was the first to promulgate all those precepts which the Bible depicts him as promulgating as a result of their having been supposedly revealed to him by God, there is no reason to suppose that these precepts first occurred to Moses as a result of God's revealing them to him. Again, should any such events have occurred, such marvellous events as the Tanach depicts accompanying the divine revelation of these precepts to Moses can be more plausibly, because more simply, understood as purely natural occurrences which, because they were inexplicable at the time and possibly awesome, were thought to have been caused by God's intervention with nature. This naturalistic understanding of the events depicted by the Bible as resulting from God's special intervention is to be preferred to the orthodox view because it is simpler than it.

Likewise, the biblical doctrine which foretells of the coming of the Messiah can again most plausibly, because most simply, be understood as being an edifying wish or hope which formed itself in the minds of certain individuals who claimed God had conveyed it to them because of the psychological circumstances in which the

doctrine first appeared in their minds. For example, the thought of the doctrine may have first occurred to them in the form of being told them by a figure who appeared to them in a dream.

In sum, with respect to the question of what superior wisdom may have been revealed to man beyond that which he can discover for himself through philosophy, there is no more reason to accept the position of Jewish orthodoxy than there is to accept that of Christian orthodoxy.

It is one thing to deny, as I have just done, that the Bible contains any form of revealed wisdom greater than any available to man through philosophy. It is an entirely different matter, and one we have yet to determine, whether the Bible may be thought to contain all, or any significant part of, such wisdom as man is capable of arriving at for himself through philosophy. It is to the latter question which we now turn. Here we will compare the views on this subject of arguably two of the greatest and most biblically well-informed philosophers ever to have given it any thought. These are Moses Maimonides and Baruch Spinoza. I shall endeavour to argue that the Bible can be thought to contain a substantial part of the wisdom that is discoverable through philosophy.

4.4 Revelation without grace or favour

The naturalistic account of revelation and prophecy sketched in the last section as a more plausible alternative to the orthodox Jewish view of these matters is very heavily indebted to Spinoza.¹⁹ Because of his notorious identification of God with nature, Spinoza had no difficulty about giving the appearance of being willing to affirm the reality of revelation, understood as a communication from God to man. All any such communication amounts to, for Spinoza, is that some human individual was caused to entertain the thought of some proposition, typically, in some highly unusual and atypical manner, such as hearing it asserted by some character appearing to them in a dream or vision. Since, according to Spinoza, God, that is, nature, is ultimately responsible for all that occurs, including all that happens to anyone, it is legitimate on his view to describe God as responsible for each instance in which anyone comes to entertain a proposition in such a fashion. Spinoza, of course, did not maintain that everything that anyone ever thinks or imagines is or should be called a revelation from God, despite his having been prepared to claim that this was so strictly speaking. He was willing to follow common usage and to

reserve the terms 'revelation' and 'prophecy' for only a subset of the thoughts people have. To count as an instance of revelation, argued Spinoza, a thought which occurs to someone must possess the following two characteristics. First, the person to whom the thought occurs must feel impelled to communicate it to others, believing its content to be significant and something about which others would remain in ignorance if not communicated to them by him. Second, the thought must have as its subject-matter, or in some other way be concerned to commend or apply, that to which Spinoza refers as the *Divine law*. By this expression, Spinoza did not mean, as many have interpreted this expression, some set of precepts revealed to man by God. He means rather a recipe at which human beings have arrived by the use of their reason for achieving the highest possible human good. This, we have seen, was equated by Spinoza with what he calls the *intellectual love of God*. This is a form of activity which, I argued earlier, is identical with that which Aristotle called *theoria* and which he construed as being the goal of philosophy. The specific precepts which Spinoza subsumes under the term, 'the Divine law', receive from him this appellation, therefore, not in consequence of God having been supposed to be their *origin* or source, but rather in consequence of God being the item to which adherence to these precepts is designed to lead.

Spinoza claimed that a thought should be counted an instance of revelation only if it bears some specially intimate relation to the Divine law. In all, Spinoza identified no less than four different possible relations to the Divine law which were such that any thought which stood to the Divine law in any one of these relations could be counted as an instance of revelation. First, the thought might articulate the Divine law in whole or, as is more typical, in part. Second, a thought might articulate one or more of the several presuppositions of the Divine law. A thought could do this either by asserting some fact about God which renders God worthy of the highest love or else by its content offering people a motive to behave in ways conducive to the enjoyment of the highest good. An example of a thought which does the latter is the thought that God rewards those who are just and charitable and punishes those who are unjust and uncharitable. Third, and, perhaps, most importantly of all, a thought might extol justice and charity which modes of conduct Spinoza considered to be most conducive to the enjoyment of the highest good. Finally, a thought might admonish specific individuals or groups for failing to act in these ways or else warn of the dire consequences liable or certain to befall those who fail so to act.

Spinoza is prepared to include the Mosaic law as part of the Divine law. He does so, however, not on the grounds of supposing this law to have been designed to secure the highest good, as Spinoza conceives of it. For Spinoza does not think it was all intended to do so. Rather, for Spinoza, the Mosaic law counts as an instance of the Divine law because it had what he calls a *basis* in revelation. By this expression, Spinoza meant that *some* of the constituent precepts which make up the Mosaic law stand in the appropriate relation to the Divine law as Spinoza conceived of the latter. Within the Mosaic law, Spinoza distinguishes two different elements. The first element Spinoza refers to as the *ceremonial law*. He claims this set of precepts was promulgated by Moses upon his becoming the political leader of the Jewish people, not with a view to assisting them arrive at the highest good, but merely to assist them in achieving temporal prosperity. Spinoza claims that initially the ceremonial law was successful in achieving this limited objective because observance of it forged the newly liberated Jewish people into obedient members of a united and harmonious commonwealth who, as a result, were able to defend themselves successfully against other peoples and thereby survive. Initially so successful was the ceremonial law in achieving its purely temporal objective, argues Spinoza, that the Jewish people came to enjoy a degree of temporal prosperity which led them to regard themselves as beneficiaries of special providential care. According to Spinoza, the temporal fortunes of the Jews began to decline after the priests amended the initial political constitution which had been drawn up by Moses. The priests turned themselves into a hereditary caste supported by the rest of the population, rather than remain, as Moses had originally ordained, composed from the eldest son of each family being given over to temple service. This constitutional amendment, in Spinoza's view, had the effect of dividing priests from the people and sowed the seeds for the political disunity which eventually proved the undoing of the Hebrew commonwealth through its leading to their military defeat and to the dissolution of the commonwealth. Spinoza argues that the ceremonial law was never designed to have binding force in perpetuity, but only for the duration of the initial Hebrew commonwealth. Therefore, argues Spinoza, present-day orthodox Jews are without warrant in supposing it to continue to have binding force over them.

Distinct from the ceremonial law, according to Spinoza is a second element into which he resolves the Mosaic law. This consists of the precepts which ordain the practice of justice and charity. Unlike the

ceremonial law, argues Spinoza, this second ethical component in the Mosaic law has universal applicability and eternally binding force. The modes of conduct prescribed by this part of the Mosaic law form genuine parts of the Divine law in that they are demonstrably conducive to peace which state of affairs is the optimal social condition for the enjoyment of the highest good by those capable of it. It is only because it includes these ethical ordinances and not because of its inclusion of any of the specifically religious ones that Spinoza is willing to regard the Mosaic law as part of the Divine law.

For Spinoza, the Hebrew prophets are individuals imbued with a strong moral conscience and a highly vivid active imagination. This singular psychological endowment of theirs rendered them prone periodically to entertain thoughts concerning how the Jewish people should behave which they made God responsible for their having had and which they conveyed to the Jewish people in the hope that doing so might induce the Jewish people to improve their ways. In short, Spinoza sees prophecy and revelation as designed to inculcate ethically desirable forms of conduct in a people whom the prophets thought would be otherwise unlikely to engage in them. Spinoza regards Moses as a prophet who, quite exceptionally, communicated in the name of God, not just a set of ethical precepts enjoining charity and justice, but in addition an entire legal code intended to secure the temporal good of the members of the political commonwealth of which he had become the ruler. In Spinoza's view, the later prophets regarded compliance with the ceremonial part of the Mosaic law as being of far less importance than observance of the precepts of charity and justice.

Spinoza is enigmatic, perhaps deliberately so, as to whether contained in the Bible in whole or in part is such theoretical wisdom as man is capable of arriving at through philosophy. What is unambiguously clear is that Spinoza wished to divide humankind into two groups. The first group is composed of the members of that small elite, among whom Spinoza included himself, who are capable of engaging in philosophy and who are thereby capable of engaging in the intellectual love of God. The members of this elite are aware both that there is no higher good than this, and that the optimum social condition for its enjoyment is peace, for which the practice of charity and justice provides optimal social conditions. To the second group belong the vast remainder of humankind. They are not capable of philosophy themselves, according to Spinoza, and hence they are unable to engage in the intellectual love of God. Members of this

larger group, however, can play a part in the realisation of the highest good, although not personally able to enjoy it. By behaving justly and charitably, they can help to create the condition of peace which is needed for the enjoyment of the highest good by those capable of it. In Spinoza's view, it is only for members of the larger group that revealed religion is intended. It is designed to convince them that their own personal good is best served through their acting charitably and with justice. Revealed religions achieve this objective by teaching through parables that the practice of charity and justice always issues in the salvation of those who practise these forms of conduct. For the vast majority of humankind, claims Spinoza, it is not possible to *demonstrate* that such behaviour does. This is because, even though they might act with justice and charity, they remain unable to enjoy the most succulent fruit of the peace that results from the universal practice of such moral virtues. This is engaging in the intellectual love of God.

In being undemonstrable, the doctrine that justice and charity lead to salvation forms one of several dogmas which compose what Spinoza calls *true religion*. By this expression, he did not mean a religion all of whose constituent doctrines are true. He meant rather a system of doctrines and precepts designed to foster the highest human good through representing the justice and charity which are its necessary conditions as always leading to salvation. To propagate this dogma, those who teach it are required to posit the existence of God as well as an after-life in which those who practise justice and charity, so often unrewarded on earth, will be rewarded, and in which those guilty of injustice and inhumanity, so often left unpunished on earth, will receive their just deserts. Because the Mosaic law was principally designed to promote the temporal well-being of those bound by it, and not their spiritual well-being, it held out the promise of temporal reward for compliance and threatened temporal punishment for non-compliance.

Spinoza observes that, save in the case of those able to engage in philosophy and thereby able to experience the intellectual love of God, it is not possible to demonstrate that justice and charity will always issue in their salvation. Nonetheless, despite its purveying undemonstrable dogmas, Spinoza commends revealed religion for two main reasons. First, so he argues, there is no one who does not benefit from the universal practice of justice and charity, for all benefit from peace. Second, these forms of conduct promote peace which is the optimum social condition for philosophy and hence for the enjoy-

ment of the intellectual love of God by members of that small elite capable of philosophy. This latter line of reasoning of Spinoza's is very reminiscent of the defence of justice which Plato offers. Plato ultimately commends the practice of justice for its enabling philosophers to engage in *theoria*, on behalf of whom Plato also sanctions a number of 'noble lies'. In the final analysis, Spinoza sanctions revealed religion as a form of noble lie which is designed to moralise the masses for the sake of benefiting that small elite minority who, by virtue of their being able to engage in philosophy, are able to enjoy the intellectual love of God.

Spinoza also proffered a second, somewhat less jaundiced view of what wisdom is contained in the Bible. This second view of his brings Spinoza much closer to Maimonides, although remaining at some considerable distance from him. According to Spinoza's second view, revealed religion is designed to instil in the masses the love of God, as well as designed to impress upon them the desirability of charity and justice by propounding the undemonstrable dogma that such conduct always leads to salvation. Revealed religion is said to fulfil this more elevated function by teaching that God exists and that God possesses such attributes as make God supremely worthy of love. On this second view, revealed religion still turns out to be a surrogate for philosophy and as intended for those otherwise unable to arrive at such convictions and sentiments through philosophical reflection. However, on this second view of it, revealed religion bears such a close resemblance to philosophy in terms of the doctrines it seeks to instil as to qualify for being supposed to purvey a very substantial part, if not the whole, of such theoretical wisdom as is independently discoverable by philosophy.

Almost 500 years before Spinoza expressed this view, and in terms far less equivocal than Spinoza's, Moses Maimonides maintained that the purpose of revealed religion is to instil in all the same set of convictions as those to which philosophy leads and in which theoretical wisdom consists. Unlike Spinoza, however, Maimonides was an orthodox Jew. As a result, Maimonides believed, unlike Spinoza, that God had intervened in the course of nature to reveal the Jews to be His chosen people and that they were bound in perpetuity to observe the Mosaic law and were destined to enjoy perpetual peace and tranquillity upon the arrival of the Messiah. Moreover, as an orthodox Jew, Maimonides accepted that the entire contents of the Pentateuch had been revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai and hence contained no falsehood. Wherever any of its verses would yield a falsehood if

understood literally, they demanded and received from Maimonides an allegorical interpretation in which they were understood to be asserting some profound metaphysical truth. Indeed, by means of assigning allegorical meanings to biblical verses, Maimonides claimed to discern in the Pentateuch nothing less than the entire corpus of Aristotelian philosophy, minus such parts of it, as, for example, Aristotle's doctrine of the eternity of the world, as Maimonides considered to be both undemonstrable and inconsistent with scriptural assertion understood literally.

Spinoza would have none of Maimonides' uncritical acceptance of the Pentateuch. He took issue with Maimonides on two main counts. First, Spinoza disputed Maimonides' assertion that, because it was to be understood as the record of revelation, the Bible could not be thought to contain any false assertions. For Spinoza, what distinguished the prophets or recipients of revelation from others was not their greater intellects but only their more acute moral sense and more vivid imaginations. Consequently, their understanding of God was often quite defective, philosophically speaking. Second, Spinoza ridiculed Maimonides' claim that the Bible contained the entire teaching of Aristotelian philosophy in allegorical form.

When considering the status of orthodox Judaism in the previous section, we sided with Spinoza against Maimonides over whether the Bible should be thought to contain any form of divinely revealed wisdom that exceeds that which man is capable of arriving at for himself through philosophy. We are now considering a different but no less important question. This is whether the Bible contains all, or a substantial part, of such wisdom as man is capable of arriving at by means of philosophy. On this latter question, Maimonides arguably comes closer to the truth than Spinoza. For Maimonides seems correct in having supposed the Bible to have been principally designed to inculcate in everyone the same wisdom as that after which philosophy aspires and to which this discipline leads when rightly pursued. As I have previously claimed, Spinoza equivocates on how much, if any, wisdom is to be thought of as taught by revealed religion. Most often, he suggests that it is nothing more than a noble lie, useful only in encouraging the masses to behave in ways that ultimately are of greatest benefit only to the small minority capable of philosophy who alone are thereby capable of engaging in the love of God. Occasionally, as was remarked, there surfaces in Spinoza's writings a more generous interpretation of Judaism. Here, the Bible is said to be concerned with instilling in everyone belief in doctrines designed to

lead to the love of God. Even on these occasions, however, Spinoza seems at pains to portray what he calls the ceremonial law as having been designed for no more spiritually uplifting an end than the temporal well-being of the Jewish people, not their spiritual well-being or philosophical enlightenment.

On this question of the didactic aim of the ceremonial law, Maimonides arguably stands closer to the truth than Spinoza. Maimonides might well have been mistaken to suppose to be true everything which the Bible portrays as having been revealed. Nonetheless, despite having vastly overestimated the wisdom contained in the Bible, Maimonides can be regarded as standing closer to the truth than Spinoza on the subject of how much wisdom is contained in the Bible. This is because he asserted a truth which Spinoza always and everywhere consistently denies. This is that the prime and ultimate objective of the religion delineated in the Bible is the inculcation of theoretical wisdom, understood as acceptance of that set of doctrines with which theoretical wisdom is equated by the classical conception of philosophy. These doctrines were the existence of God as the explanation of the world and an identification of man's highest good with a form of love of God and which is achieved in the activity of contemplating God. On this issue, as I shall now attempt to argue, Maimonides appears to have had a more accurate assessment of the wisdom taught by revealed religion than Spinoza.

As Spinoza was later to do, Maimonides employed the term the 'Divine law' to designate 'that regimen which perfects humanity'.²⁰ He claimed it did by leading those who comply with it to the love of God. Unlike Spinoza, however, Maimonides equates the Divine law with the Mosaic law. Maimonides conceives the goal of the Mosaic law to be the perfection of all humanity, not just the Jewish people alone, despite only Jews being bound by it. By their observing the Mosaic law, the Jews 'serve as a light unto other nations'. Jewish observance of the Mosaic law brings the idea of God to the attention of other nations and this will lead, in Maimonides' view, to their acquiring belief in God's existence and ultimately to their loving God too. Jewish observance of the Mosaic law, thus, serves an educative purpose with respect to all humanity, not just with respect to the Jews.

For Maimonides as for Spinoza, the prophets are individual recipients of revelation. Unlike Spinoza, however, Maimonides supposed revelation to be the product of some special miraculous act of intervention on God's part which causes the prophets to experience thoughts which would otherwise not have occurred to them.

Whereas, for Spinoza, the prophets are distinguished from others by virtue of their moral virtue and lively imaginations, Maimonides imputes to them what he calls their 'speculative perfection'. By this term, Maimonides meant theoretical wisdom. He equated this with possession of a set of correct opinions about God, which being correct, are such as are bound to evoke love of and devotion towards God. Such opinions also result in moral virtue. They are said to do so, in part, because they issue in the love of God besides which all other pleasures lose their attraction, and, in part, because they include the belief that God is just and merciful. These are qualities which those who love God will seek to acquire for themselves in order more closely to resemble the object of their love. According to Maimonides, it is the combination of speculative perfection and a perfect imaginative faculty that renders an individual suitable for becoming a prophet through receiving a revelation. Possession of such a psychological make-up, however, does not guarantee that someone will receive a revelation.

Maimonides may undoubtedly have been guilty of much naivety in having believed in the historical existence of all those individuals whom the Bible depicts as having been subject to divine revelation. No doubt, also, in the case of any such individuals who did exist and who entertained such notions as the Bible claims were divine revelations, Maimonides was no less naive in supposing them to have resulted from some miraculous interventions on God's part. Nonetheless, all such naivety on Maimonides' part is wholly besides the point. For what is presently under consideration is whether or not the ultimate objective of the Mosaic law was the inculcation of correct opinions about God. Maimonides might have been correct in claiming the Mosaic law to have had such an ultimate objective, even if the biblical account of what was revealed to Moses and the other prophets is wholly erroneous.

That the ultimate objective of the Mosaic law could have been the spiritual perfection of man might seem implausible. For many of the precepts within it, such as, for example, those dealing with animal slaughter, seem to have no connection with any such lofty objective. However, as Maimonides was at pains to emphasise, it is necessary to bear in mind the ultimate objective of the Mosaic law could be achieved only through the creation of a historical community in which the true God was recognised and worshipped. Such a community had to be formed from a people who, at the time, were exposed to and steeped in the religious beliefs and practices customary among

the surrounding peoples who were polytheistic and who practised animal, if not human, sacrifices. Consequently, argues Maimonides, the Mosaic law had initially to contain much that was crude and barbaric in order that its elevated parts could gain any purchase. It had to contain precepts which enjoined barbaric practices which reflected the barbaric times in which it was first promulgated and without which it would have been too elevated to be able to become accepted.

On the question whether the Mosaic law had as its ultimate objective the spiritual perfection of mankind through inculcating right opinions about God, it matters not one jot that Maimonides may have been misled by the Bible into mistakenly supposing this law to have been revealed to Moses. What matters is whether he was correct in having supposed that compliance with this law was ultimately intended to lead to correct opinions about God. Again, that it may not *originally* have been ordained with this objective in mind does not preclude Maimonides from having been correct to suppose this law capable of serving this end and in supposing that it was with this end in view that this law came to be incorporated in the Bible.

No doubt, Spinoza was correct and Maimonides was mistaken in what each thought about the claim of the Jews to be a people 'chosen' by God to serve as a light unto other nations. No doubt, Spinoza was also correct and Maimonides mistaken about what each thought about whether the Mosaic law was intended to apply to the Jewish people for all perpetuity. That Maimonides was wrong on these issues does not establish that Maimonides may not have been correct, and Spinoza mistaken, about whether the Mosaic law had the elevated purpose of instilling in mankind such correct opinions about God as would engender the love of God. Maimonides' view that it did becomes more plausible when it is borne in mind that the biblical books in which the Mosaic law is contained, namely, Deuteronomy and Leviticus, were composed well *after* the period of the prophets. This explains how these books were able to espouse such an elevated ethical monotheism which had almost certainly not yet developed during the Mosaic period several hundred years beforehand which these books are nominally about.

Being an observant Jew, Maimonides had not, unlike Spinoza, suffered excommunication for his heterodox views. Arguably, as a result, Maimonides was much more readily able to see than Spinoza how orthodox Jewish observance, especially since the time of the Second Temple, could be understood as having the spiritually elevated purpose of inculcating in those who observe it a form of theoretical

wisdom and the love of God that issues from such wisdom. Doubtless, it is equally possible so to construe Christian and Muslim observance.

The aim of the present section has not been to argue in favour of any one revealed religion. Rather, it has been to show how and why the Bible can be thought to contain wisdom and what wisdom it can be thought to contain. It has been argued that the Bible can be looked upon as ultimately designed to inculcate much the same sort of wisdom as philosophy was formerly conceived to do. Specifically, the Bible can be supposed to have been designed to instil such opinions about God as facilitate the love of God and as make such a form of sentiment the supreme human good. Not only, therefore, do the monotheistic religions not pose any obstacle for the reinstatement of wisdom as the goal of philosophy. Rightly understood, they can be considered to be congruent with philosophy, rather than opposed to it. With this conclusion, we reach the terminus of our enquiry.

5

Conclusion

We who live in the West pride ourselves on living in an enlightened age. Never, so we boast, has there been more scholarship or a larger number of students graduating from universities. Never has the entire accumulated stock of 2500 years of culture been more readily or widely available through the mediums of print, television and internet. Never has there been a society which collectively enjoys greater knowledge and mastery of nature. Even the standards of public morality, we pride ourselves, have never been higher or more humane, at least, in precept, if not in practice.

If the argument of this book has been sound, the sad truth is that ours is a culture that has never been more spiritually lost. The cause of the darkness which serves to distinguish our times from practically all earlier epochs may ultimately be traced back to the virtual disappearance from among the most highly educated strata, especially those concerned with educating the young, of any belief in the existence of God. Among the many consequences of the widespread abandonment of theism has been the virtual disappearance from among the class of professional philosophers of any conception of what theoretical wisdom was formerly thought to consist in, let alone any concern with its acquisition.

In so far as theism remains openly espoused today by university educators, it is espoused within departments of theology, not philosophy. Even here, the notion that wisdom and theism have much to do with one another remains very much a minority opinion. Even among those with affiliation to some organised form of religion, it is all too rare today to find any who make the contemplation of God their supreme goal, except that small minority who withdraw from the world into monasteries. Among those with no religious affiliation, the

number who do is surely still smaller.

Those with affiliation to organised religion in some form typically regard such knowledge as they believe philosophy to be capable of achieving on its own to fall far short of that which they believe has been disclosed by means of revelation and for the acceptance of which faith is needed. For their own part, most philosophers today are without any form of religious affiliation and are wont to suppose all such to be no more than the ill-informed superstitious relic of a pre-scientific era and unworthy of serious consideration today. It has been the aim of this book to challenge both sets of attitudes. It has sought to do this by endeavouring to establish the following pair of complementary theses. The first is that the Bible contains no greater insight into the nature of reality and man's highest good than philosophy is able to arrive at unaided by revelation. The second is that the Bible contains no less insight into the nature of reality and man's highest good than philosophy can arrive at unaided by revelation. I have sought to establish these theses by arguing that the Bible can be regarded as espousing virtually identical doctrines to those which form what I have called the classical conception of philosophy. That it does is not fully recognised today, either by practising Jews and Christians or by professional philosophers, most of whom appear to be as little conversant with the classical conception as they are with the teachings of the Bible.

It might be wondered why, in order to accomplish my main objective of defending the classical conception of philosophy, I should have found it necessary or desirable to make an excursus into biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. 'Surely', it might be said, 'it was not at all necessary to consider the Bible in order to reinstate the view that the theoretical wisdom after which philosophy traditionally aspired consists in a knowledge of God's existence and that the highest form of human happiness consists in the contemplation of God which the knowledge of God makes possible. Surely, it would have sufficed simply to defend the classical conception of philosophy in its pagan form. Why bother to show that the same set of doctrines as lie at the core of the classical conception can also be found in the Bible? In what way will such a demonstration further the cause of the rehabilitation of wisdom?'

My motive in conducting this exercise has been tactical. To secure the rehabilitation of the classical conception of philosophy, I have judged it necessary to show that its constitutive doctrines are also present within the Bible. This has been necessary to overcome a wide-

spread misconception about theism that has been one of Nietzsche's most abiding legacies to present-day philosophy and which, perhaps more than anything else, lies behind present-day philosophical resistance to theism. This misconception consists in the erroneous belief that monotheism is peculiar to the Judaeo-Christian tradition which failed to achieve anything like the same levels of philosophical profundity as did the pagan Greek philosophers. In the case of Nietzsche, this prejudice was undoubtedly strengthened by his having taken over from Schopenhauer a further and no less presently pervasive assumption which, if my argument has been sound, is no less erroneous. This is that between them Hume and Kant have successfully refuted all arguments for the existence of God.

Being satisfied that there was no way in which the existence of God could be established, Nietzsche was led to develop a sociology of morals and religion according to which the ascendancy within Europe of Judaeo-Christian values and convictions, including theism, has amounted to the victory of those in possession of a slave mentality. This he claimed to be marked by a resentment characteristic of the weak and spiritually infirm towards the naturally strong and aristocratic peoples who, by rights, should naturally rule, but who have instead for centuries been weighed down by the bad conscience implanted in them as a result of the victory of the slave revolution in morals.

Among the most abiding parts of Nietzsche's legacy has been to have created in the minds of present-day philosophers the nagging suspicion that, in no matter how philosophically sophisticated a guise, monotheism remains at root nothing more than the emasculating residue of the triumphant assertion of the will to power of slaves which it is better for people to be without, at least the more naturally intelligent and creative ones. Such a suspicion cannot but predispose those sharing it to look unfavourably and with mistrust upon all forms of monotheism and therefore to remain resistant to any purported philosophical demonstration of its truth. It is this disdain of Nietzsche's for the Judaeo-Christian tradition which inspired Heidegger to call for the creation of a new German culture which would be free from the Judaeo-Christian incubus in whose spiritual grip Nietzsche had led Heidegger to suppose Europe had languished for so many centuries. It equally lay behind Heidegger's attempt to find a new beginning for philosophy by returning all the way to the Parmenidean notion of Being which Heidegger rightly saw would be the only way to avoid having to come into contact with the theism

which *he* knew lay at the core of Plato's and Aristotle's metaphysics and which therefore was always liable to reopen the door to Judaeo-Christian values. Echoes of a similar and scarcely less well concealed Nietzschean disdain for Judaeo-Christian metaphysics and values can be heard among the calls of some latter-day Anglo-American philosophers for the wholesale abandonment of the institution of morality, centred as it is around the notion of 'moral obligation', which they have taken to derive from a Jewish-Christian slave culture in which ethics could not be conceived save in an imperatival form and which they erroneously claim to have been absent among the Greek aristocratic classes who first began to philosophise and whose outlook they equally mistakenly think to have been wholly naturalistic in character.

Wisdom cannot once again be restored to its rightful place as the goal of philosophy and as occupying a pivotal place in our culture, until two pervasive dogmas have been fully exorcised. The first is that the ancient Greek philosophers lacked anything that approximates to, let alone was identical with, the Judaeo-Christian notion of God. The second is that the ancient Jews and Christians lacked anything corresponding to the Greek notion of wisdom. Chapter 2 of this study was concerned to expose as an error the first of these two dogmas. Chapter 4 was intended to demonstrate the erroneousness of the second.

The most fateful philosophical error of modern times, and the one which remains the greatest obstacle to the recovery of wisdom in philosophy, is to suppose the pagan mentality of classical Greek antiquity to have been fundamentally incompatible or otherwise at variance with that of Hebraism. This erroneous view results from accepting two others. The first is that nothing remotely similar to the Judaeo-Christian concept of God appears in Greek philosophy until *after* its encounter with Judaism during the Hellenistic period of the third century BC. The second is that nothing remotely similar to the classical Greek notion of wisdom appears within the Judaeo-Christian tradition until after that same encounter. Chapter 2 has sought to contest the first of these two doctrines, Chapter 4, the second. In the latter chapter, I aimed to establish that, at the heart of Judaism, and hence also at the heart of the very earliest form of Christianity, lies the very same set of doctrines as constitute what I have been calling the classical conception of philosophy.

Only after it has been shown that God was not unknown to the pagan Greek philosophers, nor theoretical wisdom unknown to the authors of the Hebrew Bible, will it be possible today for those whose

culture has for so long been immersed within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but who have been misled by Nietzsche and others into disparaging their Judaeo-Christian heritage, to feel comfortable and at ease with the classical conception of philosophy, and beyond that with the entire tradition of western learning and culture more generally. The latter was once the pride of the West but has become today for so many philosophers and other intellectuals nothing but an embarrassment.

My central aim has been to demonstrate that something closely approximating to the constitutive doctrines of the classical conception of philosophy also formed an integral part of both the Jewish and Christian traditions. This should not be taken to mean, as some have supposed, that every sentence of the Bible is capable of some metaphorical or allegorical construction which turns it into some profound philosophical statement. Nor should I be taken to be asserting that *theoretical wisdom* is the special preserve of any particular form of organised religion, any more than I should be supposed to be asserting that religion contains the constitutive doctrines of the classical conception in as well-articulated and defended form as they assumed in pagan Greek philosophy. All I have claimed is that, in common with the classical conception, these religions portray the love of God to be man's highest good, as well as the by-product of the knowledge of God as the explanation of the world in which they deem human wisdom to consist. To establish this, I have sought to show how and why philosophy should not be construed as unequal to the task of demonstrating these doctrines, nor revealed religion construed as able to go beyond them.

As the more affluent and secure parts of the world celebrated the arrival of the third millennium, there was surely great irony in the fact that their inhabitants had seemingly lost all real affection for that whose two-thousandth anniversary they were supposed to be celebrating – namely, the arrival of God on earth. I do not doubt that Judaism and Christianity have fulfilled a vital function in leading people to a love of God and neighbour who might otherwise not have been led to such love. But the Jewish and Christian myths no longer have the resonance they once did, and there is *no* reason for philosophers to seek to revive or defend them. It is different in the case of monotheistic belief, for here there are reasons internal to philosophy for the notion of God to be revived and taught. But philosophers must first become aware of the history of that notion. That has been the object of this book.

The Spanish-American philosopher, George Santayana, once famously observed that those unfamiliar with the history of philosophy are doomed to repeat it. My contention has been that there is a worse fate liable to befall those unfamiliar with the history of philosophy. That is to be doomed not even to begin the subject. Such is the sad fate which, if the argument of this book has been correct, has befallen most of those who have called themselves philosophers this century. But it is never too late to learn – not even for professional philosophers to do so. There is no better place for philosophers to start today than with the ancient Greek conception of theoretical wisdom.

Those who rediscover the ancient Greek idea of wisdom will realise just how wide of the mark have been all those who have become persuaded that the point of the world is for humans to change not interpret it as philosophers have done. If the argument of this book has been sound, that is the very reverse of the truth. The point of the world is for human beings to interpret it in the way in which philosophers who have espoused the classical conception of philosophy have done. When and in proportion as they do, so will the world automatically change for the better. Although an ancient discipline, when rightly conceived of and engaged in as the quest for wisdom, philosophy is among the most important and worthwhile forms of human endeavour possible. It is certainly a discipline for which there continues to be as much need as there was when the ancient Greeks looked up at the heavens in wonderment and were led to the same explanation of them as that to which the Hebrews quite independently were led. Let us hope that the dazzling glow of modern technology and science will not permanently prevent mankind from being able once again to achieve the same wisdom as was achieved all those millennia ago at the dawn of philosophy.

Notes

1 Philosophy without Wisdom

1. My use of this particular nomenclature derives from Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Masterson to whose writings the present section is deeply indebted. For relevant bibliographical details, see notes 2 and 3 below.
2. P. Masterson, *Atheism and Alienation: a Study of the Philosophical Sources of Atheism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 103.
3. A. Plantinga, 'Augustinian Christian Philosophy', *Monist*, 75 (1992), 291–320, p. 296.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 300.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
7. *Ibid.*
8. The account given here of what anti-realists understand by the terms *objectification* and *scientism* owes much to the discussions of these topics in D. E. Cooper, 'Modern European Philosophy' in *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, eds N. Bunnin and E. P. Tsui-James (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 702–22.
9. C. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 39.
10. 'Wisdom', *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Simon and Schuster/Macmillan, 1967), vol. 8, pp. 322–4.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 216–26, p. 216.
12. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. A. Flew (London: Macmillan, 1979).
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14. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. R. Audi (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
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 21. *Ibid.*, p. 912.
 22. *Ibid.*
 23. *Ibid.*, p. 752.
 24. R. Nozick, *The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
 25. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
 26. *Ibid.*
 27. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
 28. *Ibid.*, pp. 269–70.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
 30. A. Kenny, *Aristotle on the Perfect Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
 31. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
 32. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
 33. *Ibid.*, pp. 106–10 *passim*.
 34. R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).
 35. *Ibid.*, pp. 73–4.
 36. Franz Brentano to Carl Stumpf in a letter written New Year's Eve, 1867, quoted in C. Stumpf, 'Reminiscences of Franz Brentano', in *The Philosophy of Brentano*, ed. L. L. McAlister (London: Duckworth, 1976), pp. 13–14.
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
 38. *Ibid.*, pp. 74–5.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
 39. Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, 9.13, quoted in L. P. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology* (London and New York: Routledge 1990), p. 170.

2 The Classical Conception of Philosophy

1. A. D. Nock, *Conversion: the Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), pp. 173–4.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
3. P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. A. I. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Blackwell: Oxford and Cambridge, USA, 1995), pp. 104–5.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 107–8.
5. W. Jaeger, 'Greeks and Jews' in W. Jaeger, *Scripta Minora*, vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni Di Storie Letteratura, 1960), p. 173.
6. L. P. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 12.

7. See E. Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1941), pp. 11–12.
8. Quoted in Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, pp. 18 and 19.
9. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.iv.18 and 13 in Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press and Heinemann, 1923), pp. 61 and 63.
10. A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study in the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper, 1960), p. 31.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
12. For two clear and informative reviews of the literature on the subject, each favouring an opposite side of the issue, see J. P. Rowan, 'Platonic and Christian Theism' in *God in Contemporary Thought: a Philosophical Perspective*, ed. S. A. Matczak (New York: Learned Publications Inc., 1977), pp. 385–413; and K. F. Doherty, 'God and the Good in Plato', *New Scholasticism*, 30 (1956), 441–60. Rowan rejects whereas Doherty accepts the validity of the equation.
13. R. L. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London, Toronto and New York: Macmillan, 1962). Nettleship writes of Plato that (pp. 232–3),

Though he never hesitated to use the language of popular Greek theology to express philosophical ideas of his own, he often lets us know that this language did not and could not embody the truth as it is. The 'form of the good' in the *Republic* occupies the place in regard both to morals and science which the conception of God would occupy in a modern philosophy of morals and nature, if that philosophy considered the conception of God as essential to its system. Plato in the *Republic* does not call this principle God but form. He has assigned to a form or principle the position and function which might be assigned to God, but still speaks of it as a form or principle.

14. Rowan, 'Platonic and Christian Theism', writes (*Ibid.*, pp. 402–3),

Attempts to visualize the Good as Plato's god ... run into difficulties. The principal point at issue here is whether the Good can be considered to be a god at all in characteristically Platonic terms, and this it seems necessary to deny. In so far as it is taken to be an Idea or pure essence, ... there appears to be no genuine grounds on which its divinity in any proper sense can be based.... Alike inasmuch as both are eternal, immutable, and self-subsistent, they differ in their essential constitution and in the kind of causality that each exercises – an Idea being an impersonal nature or essence, whose causal role is exemplary, and a god, a person, a soul endowed with intelligence, and a motive cause responsible for cosmic order and becoming.

15. R. M. Hare, *Plato* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Hare writes (pp. 44–5),

[W]hy the Good plays such an important part in Plato's scheme was not explicitly stated in Plato's surviving works, [and so] commentators have

not always understood [why] ... [t]he idea of any class of things (for example men) was thought by Plato as a perfect (that is, supremely) good specimen or paradigm of the class... To know what Man is ... to know ... what it is to be a good or perfect man. Similarly to know what the Circle is, is to know what it is to be a good or perfect circle... This knowledge of the Good will comprehend knowledge of the goodness or perfections of every kind of thing, and thus of their specific natures.

16. J. C. B. Gosling, *Plato* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge, 1973). Gosling writes (p. 118) that ' [t]he vision of how everything fits is the vision of the Form of the Good, a grasp of the breath-taking magnificence and ingenuity of the plan which inspires the philosopher with a sense of the nobility of his part in the divine work'.
17. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy*, p. 69.
18. Plato, *Republic*, trans. D. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 2nd edn revised, 473c-e.
19. *Ibid.*, 475 c.
20. *Ibid.*, 476b.
21. *Ibid.*, 486a-b.
22. *Ibid.*, 486b.
23. *Ibid.*, 501b.
24. *Ibid.*, 505a.
25. *Ibid.*, 505d-506a.
26. *Ibid.*, 505a.
27. *Ibid.*, 506e.
28. See end notes 15 and 16 above.
29. Plato, *Republic*, 509b.
30. *Ibid.*, 518c-d.
31. *Ibid.*, 519c.
32. Plato, *Philebus*, trans. J. C. B. Gosling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 13.
33. Plato, *Timaeus*, 27 in *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. D. Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*, 28.
37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*, 29.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: the Timaeus of Plato* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), *passim*, pp. 34-8.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
44. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30.
45. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 52.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Plato, *Timaeus*, 30. (My emphasis.)
48. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, p. 40.

49. Plato, *Timaeus*, pp. 68–9.
50. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, p. 249.
51. F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 88–9.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 103–6 *passim*.
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56. K. Armstrong, *A History of God: from Abraham to the Present: the 4000 year quest for God* (London: Mandarin), p. 60.
57. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans W. D. Ross, from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* from *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: University Press, 1928), vol. 8, 2nd edn, 980a. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)
58. *Ibid.*, 981b28.
59. *Ibid.*, 982a1–2.
60. *Ibid.*, 982b10.
61. *Ibid.*, 982b11–28.
62. *Ibid.*, 983a6.
63. *Ibid.*, 1025b1–2.
64. *Ibid.*, 1026a10–16.
65. *Ibid.*, 1026a 17–21.
66. *Ibid.*, 1026a29–33.
67. *Ibid.*, 1064a33–36.
68. *Ibid.*, 1064a37–1064b6.
69. See *ibid.*, 1069a30–1069b4.
70. See *ibid.*, 1071a1.
71. The argument occurs in Aristotle, *Physics*, trans R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gayle, from Aristotle's *Philosophy of Nature in The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), vol. 2, 241b24–242a16. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)
72. See *Physics*, 251b11–28.
73. See *ibid.*, 265a13–20.
74. Aristotle 'Metaphysics', 1072a 21–26.
75. *Ibid.*, 1073a12–13.
76. *Ibid.*, 1072a26–27.
77. *Ibid.*, 1072b1–5.
78. The interpretation of Aristotle's view of God which is advanced here, as well as the case on its behalf, is heavily indebted to Franz Brentano. See, especially, the Appendix, 'Of the Activity, Especially the Creative Activity of Aristotle's God', in F. Brentano, *The Psychology of Aristotle: in Particular His Doctrine of the Active Intellect* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 162–80. See also F. Brentano, *Aristotle and His World View* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978).
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80. Aristotle 'De Caelo', trans. J. L. Stocks, from Aristotle's *Philosophy of Nature*

from *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), vol. 2, 1.4.271a33. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)

81. Aristotle, 'De Generatione et Corruptione', trans. H. H. Joachim, from *Aristotle's Philosophy of Nature*, from *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), vol. 2, 2.1033b27. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)
82. Aristotle 'Metaphysics', XII, 7, 1072b30–35.
83. *Ibid.*, XII, 5, 1071b12–18.
84. Aristotle, 'Ethica Nicomachea', trans. W. D. Ross, from *Aristotle's Ethics* from *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), vol. 9, 1178b8–23. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)
85. Aristotle 'Physics', 187a32–187b1.
86. *Ibid.*, 258b32–259a7.
87. See W. D. Ross, *Aristotle: a Complete Exposition of his Works and Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 179.
88. Aristotle 'Metaphysics', XII, 9, 1074b21.
89. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 179.
90. Aristotle, 'Ethica Nicomachea', 1179a22–31.
91. See Aristotle 'Metaphysics', XII, 7, 1073a1–5.
92. Aristotle, 'Ethica Nicomachea', VI, 2, 1139b10–11.
93. Aristotle 'Metaphysics', XII, 9, 1075a5–11.
94. *Ibid.*, XII, 10, 1075a12–19.
95. *Ibid.*, 1072b10–13.
96. *Ibid.*, 1026b 27–30.
97. Aristotle, 'De Generatione et Corruptione', 11, 10, 336b28–37.
98. Aristotle 'Politica', trans B. Jowett, from *Aristotle's Politics and Economics* from *The Oxford Translation of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), vol. 10, 1, 2 1253a 31–2. (Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.)
99. *Ibid.*, 1, 8, 1256b15–22.
100. Aristotle, 'Physics', II, 8, 199a7–29.
101. Aristotle, 'Politica', 1, 4, 1254a29–1254b7.
102. Aristotle's 'Ethica Nicomachea', 1097b25–1098a18.
103. *Ibid.*, X, 6, 1177a12–19.

3 The Decline and Fall of the Classical Conception

1. Epictetus, *Moral Discourses*, trans. E. Carter (London: Dent, 1966), p. 15.
2. A. H. Armstrong (ed.), *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
4. Porphyry, 'Life of Plotinus' quoted in Armstrong, *Cambridge History*, p. 14.
5. Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. S. MacKenna (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 45.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

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9. St Augustine, *Concerning the City of God against the Pagans*, trans. H. Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 313.
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11. Ibid., p. 414.
12. Ibid., p. 430.
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21. T. Aquinas, 'Prologue to the Commentary on the Causes', quoted in Clark, *An Aquinas Reader*, pp. 82–3.
22. See B. P. Copenhaver and C. B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 24–37.
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24. O. Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 59.
25. M. Ficino, from Preface to *Platonic Theology* in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, ed. J. Kraye, vol. 1, *Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 148–9.
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27. D. Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. John Wilson (New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), pp. 178–80.
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 54. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
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 56. Quoted *ibid.*, p. vi.
 57. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), Bxxxiv.
 58. *Ibid.*
 59. *Ibid.*, Bxxx.
 60. G. Rabel, *Kant* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. vi.
 61. For a convincing objection to Kant's argument here, see A. W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 24. Wood observes (p. 24), 'In the same way as Kant acknowledged morality can *coincide* with self-interest, and that when they do, we should be moved by moral considerations, so even if we knew good acts would be rewarded we could still be motivated to perform them from moral reasons.'
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69. Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 164.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 162–3.
71. Haldane, 'Atheism and Theism', p. 50.
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74. J. Sadowsky, 'The Cosmological Argument and the Endless Regress', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 20 (1980), 465. Quoted in Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 90.
75. Hume, *Dialogues*, p. 165.
76. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A635/B663–A636/B664.
77. *Ibid.*, A182.
78. 'The unity of experience would never be possible if we were willing to allow that new things, that is, new *substances*, could come into existence', *ibid.*, A186/B229.
79. 'If we assume that something absolutely begins to be, we must have a point of time in which it was not. But to what are we to attach this point, if not to that which already exists? For a preceding empty time is not an object of perception', *ibid.*, A188/B231.
80. *Ibid.*, A617/B645.
81. *Ibid.*, A635/B663–A636/B664.
82. *Ibid.*, A461/B489–A460/B488.
83. Hume, *Dialogues*, pp. 115–16.
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100. I am deeply indebted to John Haldane's treatment of this problem.
101. For this argument, I am deeply indebted to the work of Richard Swinburne. See, especially, R. Swinburne, *Is There a God?* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 4.
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112. F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 96–7.
113. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–4.
114. R. Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London, Boston, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).
115. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
116. *Ibid.*, p. 126.
117. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, p. 93.

4 The Wisdom of the Book Revisited

1. See J. Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, trans. D. Silverman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 21.
2. See H. A. Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1, *Faith, Trinity, Incarnation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 22–3.
3. See the eighth of the Thirteen Principles of the Jewish Faith first formulated by Maimonides in the twelfth century and still included in the prayer book of orthodox Jews. This runs, 'I believe with perfect faith that

the entire Torah, now in our possession, is the same that was given to Moses our teacher, peace be upon him.' For the orthodox interpretation of this principle, see the discussion of the doctrine, *Torah min hashamayim*, or 'Torah from Heaven' in J. Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought after the Holocaust* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1992), ch. 6, 'Judaism and its texts', esp. pp. 193-4.

4. I here follow J. N. Schofield, *The Religious Background of the Bible* (London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1944), Book IV.
5. Exodus, ch. 19, verses 3-6.
6. Jewish tradition has it that, at the time of effecting this covenant, God gave all mankind seven commandments, the seven Noachian laws which are the non-ceremonial ethical injunctions subsequently contained in the Ten Commandments.
7. See, especially, R. Swinburne, *Revelation: from Metaphor to Analogy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
13. Among philosophers who argue so are Arthur Schopenhauer, Franz Brentano, C. D. Broad and R. E. Hobart. Theologians who also deny free will in Swinburne's sense include Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther, ... For details, see A. Flew, 'Anti-social Determinism', *Philosophy*, 69 (1994), 21-33.
14. 'For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me ... I did not receive ... from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.... When he ... who was pleased to reveal his Son to me in order that I might preach among the gentiles, I did not ... go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia.' (Galatians 1:11-17)
15. See, especially, H. Maccoby, *Revolution in Judea: Jesus and the Jewish Resistance* (London: Ocean Books, 1973); *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1986); *Judaism in the First Century* (London: Sheldon Press, 1989); *A Pariah People: the Anthropology of Antisemitism* (London: Constable and Co., 1996).
16. See, for example, G. Allen, *The Evolution of the Idea of God* (London: Watts and Co., 1931), esp. chs XIV-XVIII.
17. Maccoby, *The Mythmaker*, p. 113.
18. 1 Corinthians 11: 23-30. See verse 23.
19. See B. Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, in *Chief Works*, ed. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), vol. 1.
20. M. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), vol. 2, p. 382.

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Name Index

- Allen, G., 187, 188
 Aquinas, T., 71, 86, 183, 188
 Aristotle, 14-17, 24-8, 35, 36, 53-78,
 80-1, 86, 135, 181, 188
 Armstrong, A. H., 182, 183
 Armstrong, K., 54, 188
 Audi, R., 177, 188
 Augustine, St, 81-2, 183, 188

 Barnes, J., 54, 181, 188
 Blackburn, S., 17, 177, 188
 Boethius, 82-4, 183, 188
 Brentano, F., 26, 65, 70, 178, 181,
 187, 188
 Bunnin, N., 18, 177

 Cooper, D. E., 177, 188
 Copenhaver, B. P., 183, 188
 Cornford, F. M., 48-54, 180-1, 188,
 189
 Craig, E., 18, 178, 189

 Darwin, C., 10, 124
 Davies, B., 185, 189
 Dawkins, R., 124, 186, 189
 Descartes, R., 91-4, 183, 189
 Doherty, K. F., 179, 189

 Edwards, P., 16, 177, 189
 Epictetus, 79, 182, 189
 Erasmus, D., 89-90, 183, 189

 Ficino, M., 87-8, 183, 189
 Fletcher, W. W., 186, 189
 Flew, A., 17, 177, 187, 189

 Gerson, L. P., 37, 38, 178, 179, 189
 Gilson, E., 35, 54, 179, 181, 189
 Gosling, J. C. B., 37, 180, 189
 Grayling, A. C., 17, 177, 189
 Guttmann, J., 186, 189

 Hadot, P., 33-4, 178, 189

 Haldane, J., 108-10, 122, 185, 186,
 191
 Hamlyn, D., 87, 183, 189
 Hare, R. M., 37, 179, 189
 Heidegger, M., 31, 173
 Heine, H., 104-5
 Honderich, T., 18, 178, 189
 Hume, D., 10, 98, 100-2, 105-13,
 116-26, 184, 185, 189
 Hutcheson, F., 97, 184, 190
 Huxley, T. H., 184, 190

 Jaeger, W., 34, 178, 190

 Kant, I., 10, 98, 102-5, 113-16, 126,
 184, 185, 190
 Kenny, A., 24-7, 178, 190
 Kolakowski, L., 184, 190
 Kraut, R., 26-8, 178, 190
 Kristeller, O., 87, 183, 190

 Leibniz, G. W., 95, 183, 190
 Lovejoy, A., 36, 37, 179, 190

 McAlister, L. I., 178, 190
 Maccoby, H., 154, 187, 190
 Maimonides, M., 84-6, 165-70, 183,
 186, 187, 190
 Masterson, P., 177, 190
 Mendelssohn, M., 104
 Mossner, E. C., 184, 190

 Nettlehip, R. L., 37, 179, 190
 Newton, I., 96-7, 184, 190
 Nietzsche, F., 10, 98, 126-33, 173,
 186, 190
 Nock, A. D., 178, 190
 Nozick, R., 19-23, 178, 190

 Parkinson, G. H. R., 17, 177, 191
 Plantinga, A., 177, 191
 Plato, 34-52, 80, 87, 180, 191
 Plotinus, 80-1, 182, 191

Porphyry, 80, 182

Rabel, G., 184, 191

Ree, J., 18, 178, 191

Ross, W. D., 71, 181, 191

Rowan, J., 37, 179, 191

Sacks, J., 187, 191

Sadowsky, J., 112, 185, 186, 191

Santayana, G., 176

Schacht, R., 131-2, 186, 191

Schmitt, C. B., 183, 188

Schofield, J. N., 187, 191

Schopenhauer, A., 105, 185, 191

Sextus Empiricus, 29, 178

Shaftesbury, Lord, 97, 184, 188

Smith, A., 97, 184, 191

Socrates, 36

Spinoza, B., 94-5, 159-70, 183, 187,
191

Stead, C., 177, 191

Swinburne, R., 147-55, 186, 187, 191

Tsui-James, E. P., 18, 177, 188

Urmson, J., 18, 178, 191

Wallace, W., 184, 191

Weber, M., 4

Whichcote, B., 95-6, 183, 191

Wolfson, H. A., 186, 191

Wollheim, R., 184, 185, 189

Wood, A. W., 184, 191

Xenophanes, 35-6

Xenophon, 36, 179, 192

Subject Index

- anti-realism, 5, 7–8, 11–12
- Argument from Design, 100, 116–26
- Bible, the
 - Old Testament, 134–41
 - New Testament, 142–4, 147
- Christianity, 6–7, 10, 29–30, 33, 141–3, 146–55
- classical conception of philosophy
 - compared with naturalism and anti-realism, 8–9
 - expression defined, 3–4
 - eclipsed by Christianity, 13–14
 - expounded, 31–78
- contemplation, 24–8, 41, 67, 69, 78, 84–5, 100–1, 161
- Cosmological Argument, 46–50, 58–72, 100, 105–16
- Demiurge, Plato's, 36, 38, 48–52
- Enlightenment, 4, 10
- evil, the problem of, 118–22
- evolution, theory of, 124–6
- faith, 103–4
- form of the good, Plato's, 37–46
- gematria, 144
- God
 - as object of *theoria*, 3
 - 'death' of, 128–30
 - in Aristotle, 14–15, 24, 27–8, 53–78
 - in Plato, 37–52
 - relation to Greek polytheism, 35
- happiness, 86, 93
- hedonism, 45–6
- humanism, 86–7, 89–90
- Judaism, 134–41, 155–70
- Messiah, the
 - Christian understanding of, 143, 152–5
 - Jewish understanding of, 140
- miracles
 - defined, 136
 - naturalistically explained, 157–60
- naturalism, 6, 7, 11
- Neoplatonism, 79–81
- objectification, 11
- Ontological Argument, 99
- philosophy
 - Boethius' conception of, 82
 - Descartes' conception of, 92
 - etymology of term, 16
 - see also* classical conception of
- Platonism, 81, 87
- positivistic naturalism
 - see* naturalism
- post-modernism, 5, 8
- Renaissance, 86–90
- Revelation, 134–6, 147–50, 160–70
- scientism, 12
- sophia*
 - as goal of philosophy, 36, 41, 56, 76–8
 - as knowing why the world exists, 3
 - contrasted with *phronesis*, 23
 - neglect of in contemporary philosophy, 16–19
- Stoicism, 79
- theoria*
 - as contemplation of God, 3
 - as decadence, 127–8
 - as love of God, 93–6
 - as supreme good, 15

how different from scientific
enquiry, 25–7

wisdom
see *sophia* and *theoria*